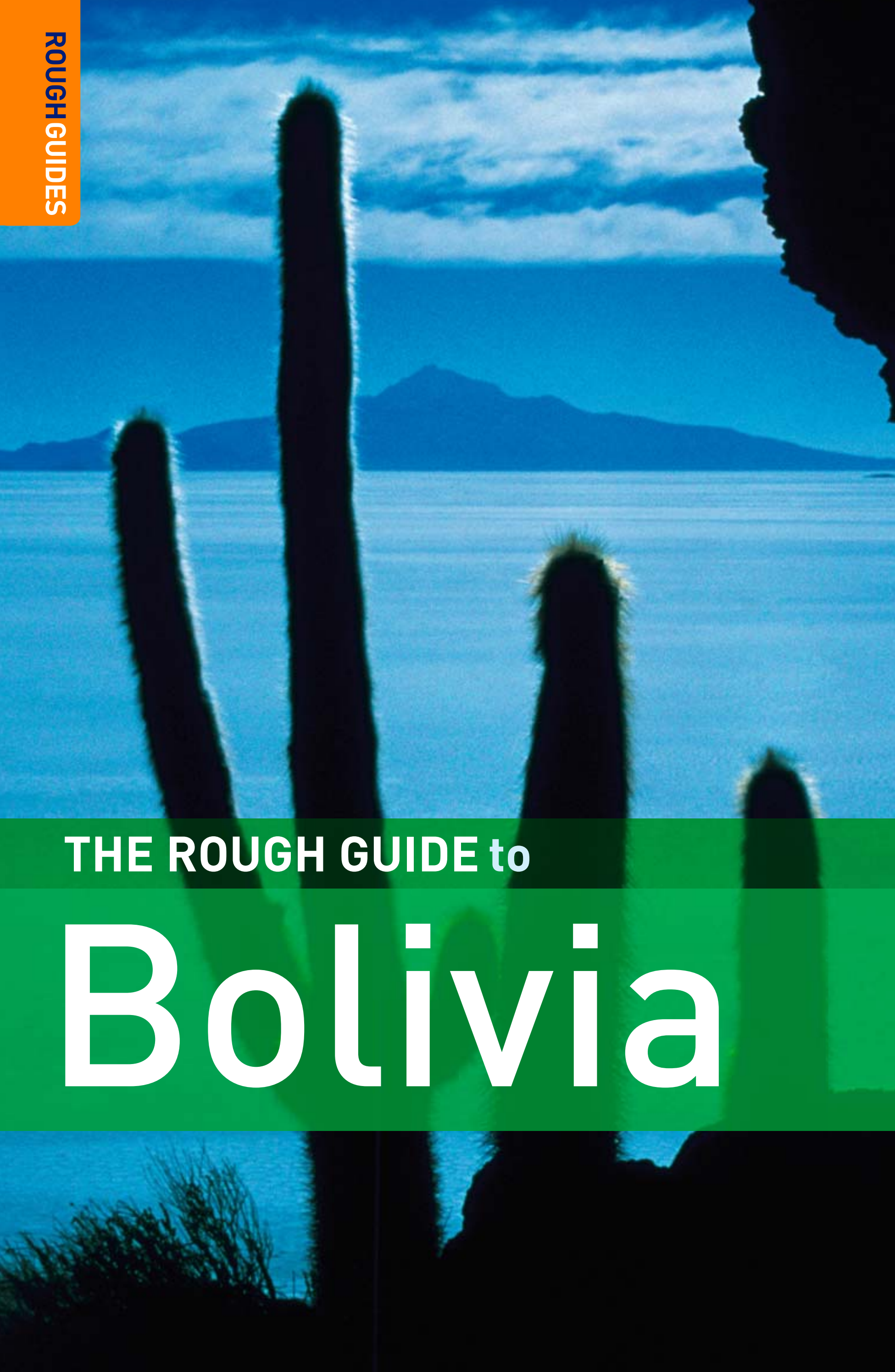
ROUGH GUIDES



THE ROUGH GUIDE to
Bolivia

VISIT…

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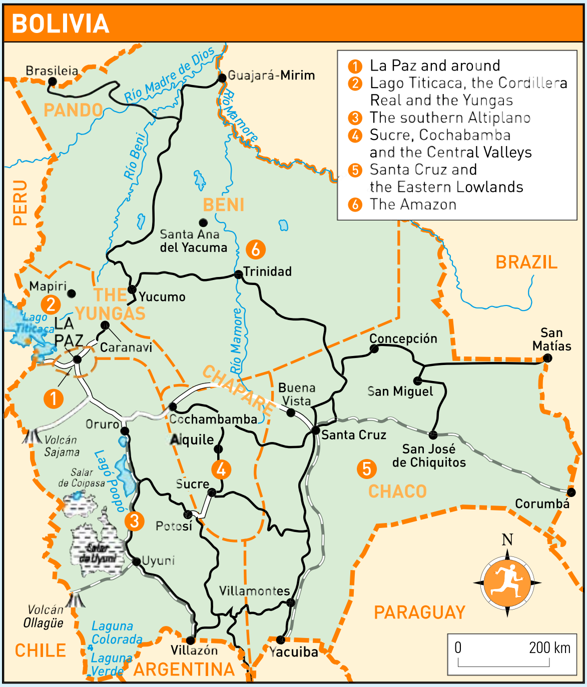
BOLIVIA
① La Paz and around
② Lago Titicaca, the Cordillera Real and the Yungas
③ The southern Altiplano
④ Sucre, Cochabamba and the Central Valleys
⑤ Santa Cruz and the Eastern Lowlands
⑥ The Amazon
Brasileia
PANDO
Río Madre de Dios
Guajará-Mirim
Río Mamoré
Río Beni
PERU
BENI
Santa Ana del Yacuma
Trinidad
BRAZIL
Mapiri
Yucumo
THE YUNGAS
Lago Titicaca
LA PAZ
Caranavi
Río Mamoré
CHAPARE
Concepción
San Matías
Buena Vista
San Miguel
Oruro
Cochabamba
Santa Cruz
Volcán Sajama
Aiquile
San José de Chiquitos
Lago Poopó
Salar de Coipasa
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About this book

Rough Guides are designed to be good to read and easy to use. The book is divided into the following sections and you should be able to find whatever you need in one of them.

The **colour section** gives you a feel for Bolivia, suggesting when to go and what not to miss, and includes a full list of **contents**. Then comes **basics**, for pre-departure information and other practicalities.

The **guide** chapters cover Bolivia's regions in depth, each starting with a highlights panel, introduction and a map to help you plan your route.

The **contexts** section fills you in on history, wildlife, music and books, while individual **colour inserts** introduce the ancient beliefs and modern mysticism found in the Andes and outdoor activities, and **language** gives you enough Spanish to get by.

The book concludes with all the **small print**, including details of how to send in updates and corrections, and a comprehensive **index**.

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The publishers and authors have done their best to ensure the accuracy and currency of all the information in The Rough Guide to Bolivia, however, they can accept no responsibility for any loss, injury, or inconvenience sustained by any traveller as a result of information or advice contained in the guide.

The **Rough Guide** to

Bolivia

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ROUGH GUIDES

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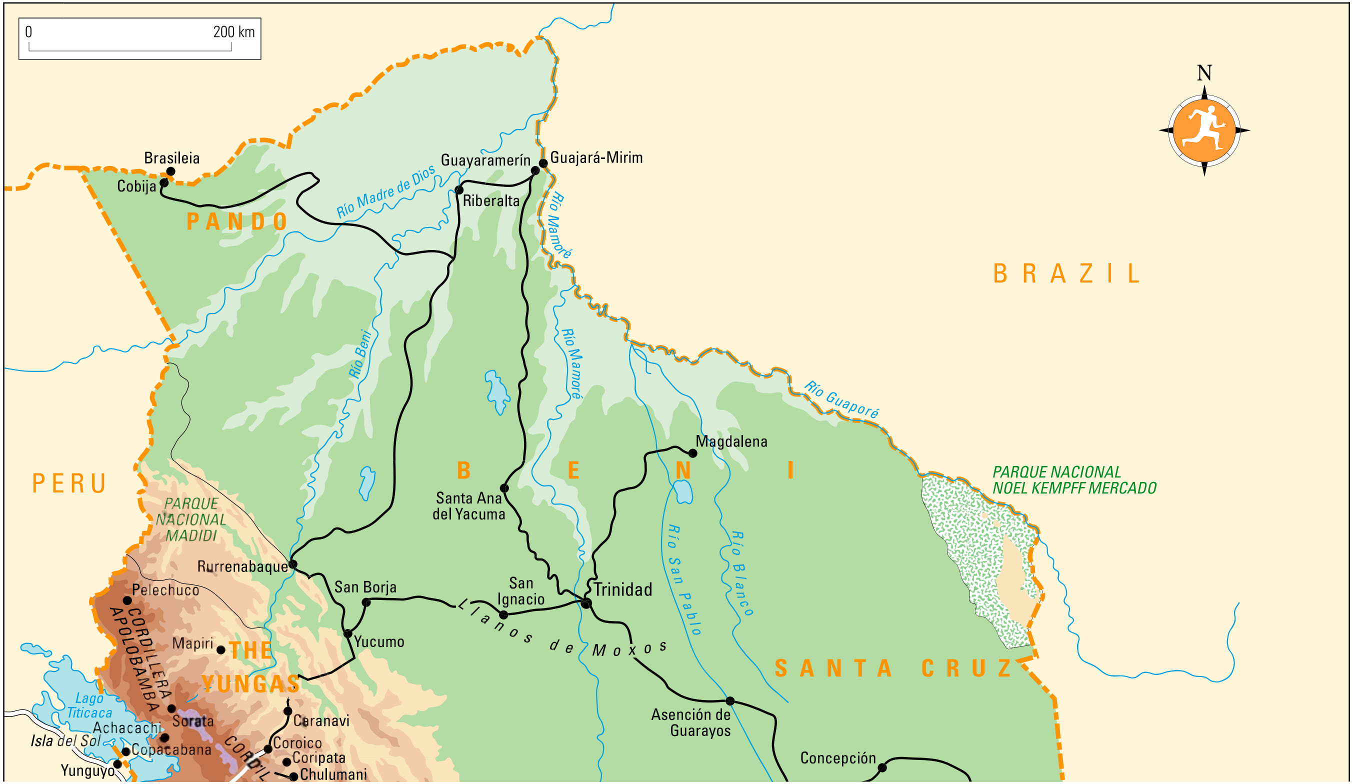
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Santa Ana del Yacuma
Magdalena
Trinidad
San Ignacio
San Borja
Yucumo
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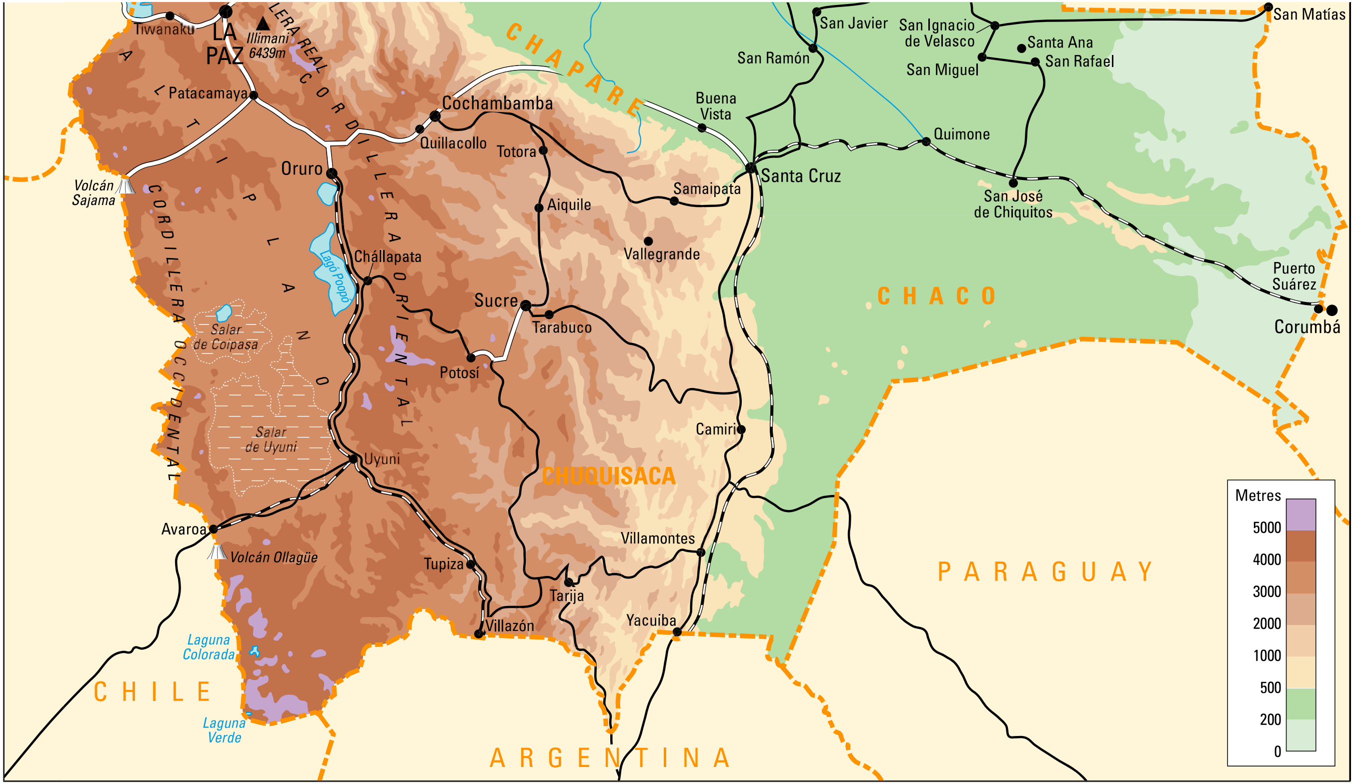
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Introduction to Bolivia

Landlocked and isolated at the heart of South America, Bolivia encompasses everything that outsiders find most exotic and mysterious about the continent. Stretching from the majestic icebound peaks and bleak high-altitude deserts of the Andes to the exuberant rainforests and vast savannas of the Amazon basin, it embraces an astonishing range of landscapes and climates. The strangeness and variety of this natural environment are matched by the ethnic and cultural diversity of the country's population: the majority of Bolivians are of indigenous descent, and the strength of Amerindian culture here is perhaps greater than anywhere else in Latin America.

Indeed, to think of Bolivia as part of "Latin" America at all is something of a misconception. Three centuries of Spanish colonial rule have left their mark on the nation's language, religion and architecture, however this European influence is essentially no more than a thin veneer overlying indigenous cultural traditions that stretch back long before the Conquest. Though superficially embracing the Catholic religion brought from Spain, many Bolivians are equally at home making offerings to the mountain gods of their ancestors or performing other strange rites, such as blessing motor vehicles with libations of alcohol. And although Spanish is the language of business and government, the streets of the capital buzz with the very different cadences of Aymara, one of more than thirty indigenous languages spoken across the country.

▲ Supporters of President Evo Morales

Geographically, Bolivia is dominated by the mighty Andes, the great mountain range that marches through the west of the country in two parallel chains, each studded with snowcapped peaks which soar to heights of over 6000 metres; between these two chains stretches the Altiplano, a bleak and virtually treeless plateau that has historically been home to most of Bolivia's population, and whose barren and windswept expanses are perhaps the best-known image of the country. Northeast of the Altiplano, the Andes plunge abruptly down into the tropical rainforests and savannas of the Amazon lowlands, a seemingly endless wilderness crossed by a series of major rivers that flow north to the Brazilian border and beyond. East of the Altiplano, the Andes slope down more gradually through a drier

Fact file

- Named after the South American independence leader **Simón Bolívar**, Bolivia became an independent republic in 1825, following nearly three centuries as a Spanish colony. Since independence, Bolivia has lost almost half its territory, including its Pacific Ocean coast, which was captured by Chile in a war in 1879.
- Bolivia has a **population** of around nine million, the great majority of whom are of indigenous descent. Over half speak an indigenous language, principally **Quechua**, the language of the Inca Empire, spoken by a third of the population, and **Aymara**, which is the mother tongue for about a quarter of Bolivia's inhabitants – another thirty or so indigenous languages are spoken by small minorities. Spanish, Quechua and Aymara are all official languages, though in practice **Spanish** remains the language of government.
- Bolivia has enjoyed relatively stable civilian rule, with democratic transitions between presidents since 1982. Historically, though, the country has been a byword for **political instability**. Between 1825 and 1982, Bolivia experienced 188 coups d'état – a statistic that won it a place in the *Guinness Book of Records*. The political and commercial centre of Bolivia is **La Paz**, which has been the seat of government and de facto capital since the end of the nineteenth century. Officially, though, Sucre remains the capital, at least in name, and is still home to the Supreme Court.

▲ Ice cliffs

region of fertile highland valleys that give way eventually to the Eastern Lowlands, a vast and sparsely populated plain covered by a variety of ecosystems, ranging from dense Amazonian rainforest in the north to the dry thornbrush and scrub of the Chaco to the south.

This immensely varied topography supports an extraordinary diversity of plant and animal life – Parque Nacional Amboró, for example, is home to over 830 species of bird, more than the US and Canada combined – and new plant species continue to be identified every year. Bolivia's underdevelopment and lack of infrastructure have in some ways been a blessing in disguise for the environment, allowing vast wilderness areas to survive in a near-pristine condition, serving as home to a variety of wildlife, ranging from the stately condors that glide above the high Andes to the pink freshwater dolphins that frolic in the rivers of Amazonia.

Though it covers an area the size of France and Spain combined, Bolivia is home to just nine million people, most of whom live in a handful of cities founded by the Spanish. Some of these, such as Potosí and Sucre, were once amongst the most important settlements in the Americas, but are now half-forgotten backwaters, basking in the memory of past glories and graced by some of the finest colonial architecture on the continent. Others, like La Paz and Santa Cruz, have grown enormously in recent decades as a result of mass migration from the countryside, and are now bustling commercial cities where traditional indigenous cultures collide with modern urban environments.

The country's underdevelopment has been a blessing in disguise for the environment, allowing vast wilderness areas to survive in a near-pristine condition

Given all these attractions, it's perhaps surprising that Bolivia remains one of South America's least-visited countries. This is largely due to its remoteness and inaccessibility: even from the capitals of neighbouring countries, Bolivia is a distant and peripheral land. Cut off by towering mountain chains or endless expanses of forest and swamp, Bolivians lament that their country is half-forgotten by the outside world. Some blame Queen Victoria, who after a diplomatic incident is said to have crossed the name from a map and declared "Bolivia does not exist". Among those who have heard a little about Bolivia, meanwhile, it has a reputation for cocaine trafficking and chronic political instability.

These cliched images have some basis in reality. Bolivia may have been a democracy since 1982, but twice in the new millennium presidents have been forced from office by mass popular protests. And revolution is very much in the air following the election in 2006 of Evo Morales as Bolivia's

Llamas, alpacas and vicuñas

▲ Alpaca

Grazing herds of llamas and alpacas are an everyday sight throughout highland Bolivia, above all on the Altiplano. The only major domesticated animals in the Americas before Old World species were introduced, they still play a vital role in the lives of the indigenous communities of the Andes. **Llamas**, in particular, are able to survive at high altitudes on grasses too tough for sheep or cattle. High in protein and low in fat, the meat of both species is widely eaten, either fresh or in a dried form known as *charque* (the origin of the English word "jerky").

Alpacas produce fine wool that is used to make the warm clothing that is essential to survival in the harsh Andean climate; llama wool is tougher, being used mostly to make ropes and blankets. Llamas also serve as pack animals, though the large llama caravans that used to travel long distances across the Altiplano carrying salt and other goods are now fairly rare. Though similar in appearance, after a while you should find it easy to distinguish between the two species: alpacas have shorter legs, necks and snouts and a thicker, fluffier fleece.

In remote regions you can also see their wild relative, the graceful **vicuña**. Population levels have recovered well in recent years, but the vicuña is still a highly endangered species, driven to the verge of extinction by hunters seeking its highly prized wool – a wool so fine that in Inca times it was reputedly reserved for the emperor himself.

first indigenous president. But this turbulence obscures the fact that Bolivia is one of the safest countries in South America for travellers, and largely free of the violent crime that blights some of its neighbours. And for those who make it here, the fact that Bolivia is not yet on the major tourist routes is an added advantage, since you're unlikely to find yourself sharing the experience with more than a handful of other foreign visitors, whilst local attitudes have yet to be jaded by the impact of mass tourism.

Where to go

Most visitors spend a few days in the fascinating city of **La Paz**, Bolivia's de facto capital, which combines a dramatic high-altitude setting with a compelling intermingling of traditional indigenous and modern urban cultures – this is a city where computer equipment and dried llama foetuses (used to make sacrifices to the mountain gods) are often sold on the same street. La Paz is also close to the magical **Lago Titicaca**, the massive high-altitude lake that straddles the border with Peru, as well as being a good base for trekking, climbing or mountain biking in the **Cordillera Real**, the magnificent range of Andean peaks that runs north of the city.

Just north of La Paz the Andes plunge precipitously down into the Amazon basin through the deep valleys of the **Yungas**, a region of dramatic scenery and sudden transformations in climate and vegetation. The Yungas towns of Coroico and Chulumani are perfect places to relax in relative warmth after the cold of the Altiplano, whilst Coroico also makes a good place to break the overland journey from La Paz to the **Bolivian Amazon**. The best base for visiting the Amazon is the town of Rurrenabaque, close to the near-pristine rainforests of Parque Nacional Madidi and the wildlife-rich Río Yacuma. More adventurous travellers can head east across the wild savannas of the Llanos de Mojos via the Reserva de la Bíosfera del Beni – another good place to observe wildlife – to the regional capital

▲ Virgen de Guadalupe, Sucre

▲ Laguna Verde

Trinidad, the start of exciting trips north along the Río Mamoré towards Brazil or south towards Cochabamba.

South of La Paz, the **southern Altiplano** – the bleak, high plateau which stretches between the eastern and western chains of the Andes – is home to some of Bolivia's foremost attractions. The dour mining city of Oruro, unavoidable as a transport hub, springs to life at Carnaval time, when it hosts one of the most colourful folkloric fiestas in all South America. The legendary and tragic city of **Potosí**, whose silver mines were the source of fabulous wealth and the scene of terrible cruelty in the colonial era, is worth visiting both for its treasure-trove of colonial architecture and for the opportunity to experience at first hand life underground in the mines of Cerro Rico.

Further south, Uyuni is the jumping-off point for expeditions into the astonishing landscapes of the **Salar de Uyuni** and the Reserva de Fauna Andina Eduardo Avaroa, a remote region of high-altitude deserts and half-frozen, mineral-stained lakes, populated by great flocks of pink flamingos and herds of vicuñas. Further southwest, towards the Argentine border, lie the cactus-strewn badlands and deep canyons around Tupiza and the isolated but welcoming southern city of Tarija.

Generally speaking, climate varies much more as a result of altitude and topography than it does between different seasons

A few hours north of Potosí by road, Bolivia's official capital, **Sucre**, boasts similarly fine colonial architecture, but is very different in character: a charming and refined city of students and lawyers set in a warm Andean valley in the midst of a region noted for its traditional weaving villages. The market city of **Cochabamba** has less obvious appeal, but enjoys

Bus leaving La Paz

a similar spring-like climate and a warm and friendly outlook that makes it a pleasant place to hang out. Northeast from here are the rainforests and coca fields of the Chapare region, but for most travellers Cochabamba is just somewhere to break the journey between La Paz and **Santa Cruz**, the country's eastern capital. Completely different in character to the introspective cities of the highlands, Santa Cruz is a brash, modern and lively tropical metropolis. Though it has little in the way of tourist attractions itself, it makes the best base for exploring the diverse attractions of the **Eastern Lowlands**, including the rainforests of Parque Nacional Amboró and the idyllic town of Samaipata. Scattered across the forested lowlands east of Santa Cruz, the immaculately restored Jesuit missions of Chiquitos provide one of Bolivia's most unusual attractions, while a train line heads east to the Brazilian border and the wildlife-rich wetlands of the Pantanal. For those with the time or money to spare, Santa Cruz is also the jumping-off point for trips to remote and beautiful Parque Nacional Noel Kempff Mercado, Bolivia's most spectacular protected area.

When to go

Generally speaking, climate varies much more as a result of altitude and topography – often over very short distances – than it does between different seasons. That said, there are clear-cut seasonal differences. As Bolivia is in the southern hemisphere, **winter** (*invierno*) runs between May and October. This is the **dry season**, and in many ways is the best

Cello maker in Urubicha

Coca: sacred leaf of the Andes

Nothing is more emblematic of Bolivia than **coca**, the controversial little leaf that has been cultivated for thousands of years in the foothills of the Andes. To ordinary Bolivians, coca is at once a useful stimulant, a medicine, and a sacred gift with magical powers. To the outside world, however, it is infamous as the raw material for the manufacture of cocaine – though few people realize it. It is also still thought to be a key ingredient of the world's most popular soft drink, Coca-Cola.

You'll find coca on sale in markets across Bolivia. Mixed with an alkaline reagent, it's a mild stimulant chewed throughout the highlands to combat hunger and tiredness; made into a herbal infusion, it's an effective natural remedy for altitude sickness; used in rituals and offerings, it's a key religious and cultural sacrament. Until recently Bolivia was the world's biggest source of the coca used to produce cocaine, and illegal exports were vital to the country's economy. In the last few years, though, under pressure from the US, the Bolivian government has eradicated much of the country's coca crop, despite vociferous protests by the thousands of indigenous farmers who depend on it for their livelihood.

time to visit Bolivia, though it's also the high season for tourism, so some prices will be higher and attractions busier. In the **highlands** it's noticeably colder at night, particularly in June and July. The days are slightly shorter, but usually bright and sunny, and the skies crystal clear, making this the best time of year for trekking and climbing. Winter is also the best time for visiting the hot and humid **lowlands**, when temperatures are generally slightly (but pleasantly) lower, although the dry season is less pronounced and rain remains

◀ House in Chacaltaya

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a possibility all year round. A few times a year, usually between July and August, the country is swept by cold fronts coming up from Patagonia, known as *surazos*, which can send temperatures plunging even in the Amazon. Towards the end of the dry season in late August and September, farmers set fire to cleared forest areas across much of Bolivia in a burning season known as the *chaqueo*; during this period heavy smoke can obscure views and cause respiratory problems.

Summer (*verano*) is the **rainy season**, which runs roughly from November to March and is much more pronounced in the lowlands. Rain affects the condition of roads throughout the country, making journey times much longer or blocking roads altogether. In much of the lowlands, particularly the Amazon, road transport becomes pretty much impossible, as huge areas are flooded and everything turns to mud – though, conversely, river transport becomes more frequent. Heat, humidity and mosquitoes are also much worse during the rainy season. In the highlands, particularly the Altiplano, it rains much less and travel is far less restricted, though delays and road closures still occur, while trekking trails get muddier and clouds often obscures views, particularly in the high mountains, where route-finding can become impossible. Despite this, the rainy season is also a very beautiful time in the Andes, as the parched Altiplano and mountainsides are briefly transformed into lush grassland and wild flowers proliferate as the earth comes to life.

Average temperatures and rainfall

	Jan	Mar	May	July	Sept	Nov
La Paz						
Max °C/°F	17/63	18/65	18/65	17/63	18/65	19/66
Min °C/°F	6/43	6/43	0/32	-1/30	0/32	6/43
Days of rain	114	66	13	10	28	48
Santa Cruz						
Max °C/°F	29/84	29/84	25/77	25/77	28/82	31/88
Min °C/°F	21/70	21/70	18/65	17/63	19/66	21/70
Days of rain	180	130	94	58	62	135
Sucre						
Max °C/°F	19/66	18/65	19/66	18/65	19/66	20/68
Min °C/°F	11/52	12/54	11/52	8/46	9/48	12/54
Days of rain	168	94	11	3	28	72

29

things not to miss

It's not possible to see everything that Bolivia has to offer in one trip – and we don't suggest you try. What follows, in no particular order, is a selective taste of the country's highlights: outstanding scenery, lively festivals, ancient sites and colonial architecture. They're arranged in five colour-coded categories, which you can browse through to find the very best things to see and experience. All highlights have a page reference to take you straight into the guide, where you can find out more.

01 **Oruro Carnaval** Page **186** • One of the most colourful fiestas in South America, during which thousands of dancers in extravagant costumes parade through the streets and revellers indulge in heavy drinking and indiscriminate water fighting.

02 **Mountain climbing** Page **48** • With six peaks over 6000m high and many more over 5000m, Bolivia is a paradise for experienced mountaineers, while even complete novices can arrange a guided climb up the 6090-metre Huayna Potosí.

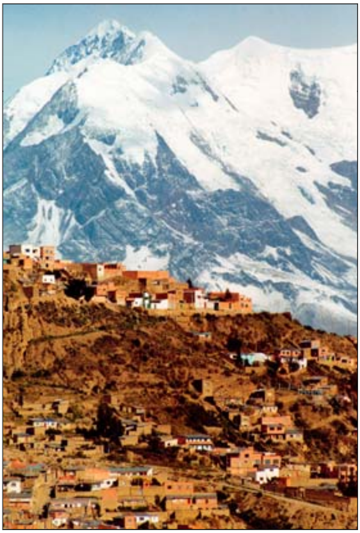
03 **Tiwanaku** Page **118** • One of the cradles of Andean civilization, and once the centre of a massive empire, Tiwanaku is now among the most intriguing and monumental archeological sites in South America.

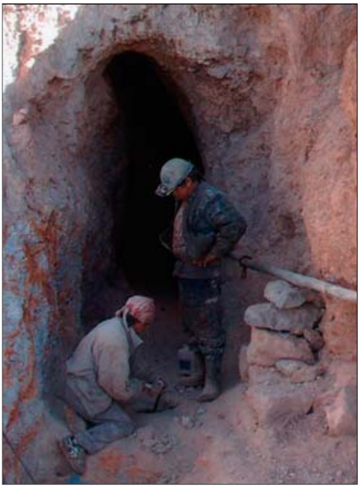
04 **Andean Textiles** Page **110** • The traditional weavings of Bolivia's indigenous highland communities are amongst the finest expressions of Andean culture, with bright colours and intricate designs laden with symbolism.

05 Reserva de Fauna Andina Eduardo Avaroa Page **225** • This remote region of high-altitude deserts, icebound volcanic peaks and half-frozen, mineral-stained lakes is home to a surprising array of wildlife, including great flocks of pink flamingos and herds of vicuñas.

06 Sorata Page **153** • Nestled in a deep valley in the heart of the Cordillera Real, the charming little town of Sorata is the perfect base for trekking in the surrounding mountains.

07 La Paz Page **73** • Nestled in a deep canyon at an altitude of over 3500m above sea level, Bolivia's de facto capital is the highest in the world, and a fascinating melting-pot of modern urban and traditional Aymara cultures.





08 Going underground in Cerro Rico Page **218** • Once a source of fabled wealth, the mines of Cerro Rico now offer the chance to see the almost medieval working conditions endured by indigenous miners prospecting amongst the thousands of mineshafts that honeycomb the mountain.

09 Aymara New Year

Page **118** & **133** • Celebrated at dozens of ancient sites throughout the highlands, the traditional religious ceremonies associated with the Aymara New Year vividly express the deeply-seated pre-Christian beliefs still held by many Bolivians.

10 Tupiza

Page **231** • Explore the dramatic desert landscape of cactus-strewn badlands and canyons around Tupiza, following the trail of the infamous North American outlaws Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid.

11 Chicha cochabambina

Page **271** • It may be an acquired taste, but no visit to the Cochabamba Valley is complete without a glass or two of chicha, the thick, tart and mildly alcoholic maize beer that was the sacred drink of the Incas.

12 **Biking down The World's Most Dangerous Road** Page **167** • The perilous highway from La Paz to Coroico is amongst the most spectacular roads in the world, plunging from the frozen high Andes down into the lush valleys of the upper Amazon.

13 **Salar de Uyuni** Page **225** • A vast, perfectly flat expanse of dazzling white surrounded by high mountain peaks, the Salar de Uyuni is the world's biggest salt lake and, perhaps, Bolivia's most extraordinary landscape.

14 **Condors** Page **149** • With a wingspan of up to three metres, the mighty Andean condor is a magnificent sight as it glides on the thermal currents above the deep Andean valleys.

15 Folk music and dance

Page **109** • Far more than just panpipes, Bolivian folk music and dance is as vibrant and varied as the country itself – you can catch performances in peñas in La Paz and other major cities, and in rural fiestas throughout the country.

16 Isla del Sol

Page **141** • Set amidst the azure expanse of Lago Titicaca, Isla del Sol is the spiritual centre of the Andean world, revered as the place where the Sun and Moon were created and the Inca dynasty was born.

17 Salteñas

Page **41** • Parcels of pastry filled with a rich stew of meat and vegetables, salteñas make the ideal mid-morning snack.

18 **Pink river dolphins**

Page **377** • Frolicking pink freshwater dolphins are a fairly common sight in the rivers of the Bolivian Amazon. You can even swim alongside them – if the piranhas and caimans don't put you off.

20 **Inca trails**

Page **150** • Perhaps the best of Bolivia's innumerable trekking routes, the Choro, Takesi and Yunga Cruz trails – the three so-called "Inca trails" – descend from amidst the icebound peaks of the Cordillera Real into the lush subtropical valleys of the Yungas.

19 **Potosí**

Page **198** • The highest city in the world, the legendary silver-mining centre of Potosí boasts some of the finest Spanish colonial architecture anywhere on the continent.

21 **Mercado de Hechiceria**

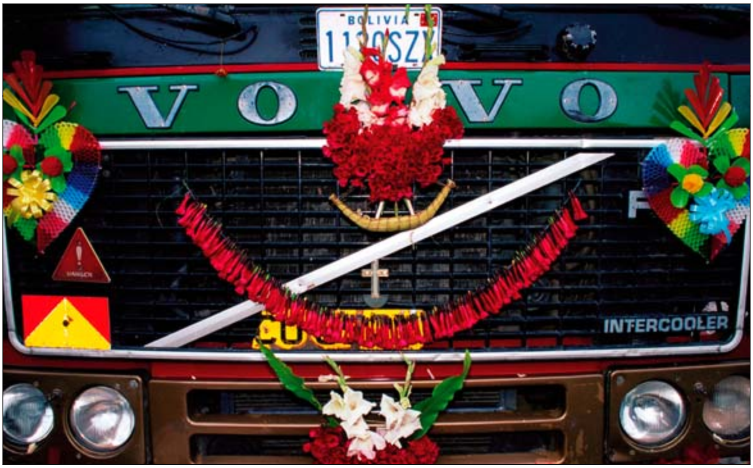
Page **97** • The most colourful of La Paz's street markets, the Mercado de Hechiceria (Witches' Market) offers a fascinating insight into the secretive world of Aymara mysticism and herbal medicine.

22 Parque Nacional Madidi Page **373** • Covering nearly 19,000 square kilometres, this park is home to some of the most diverse plant and animal life in South America.

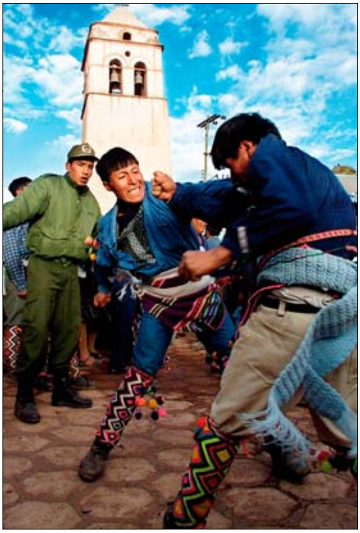
23 Feria de Alasitas Page **97** • Held in La Paz the last week of January, the Feria de Alasitas sees devotees offering miniature replicas of items such as cars, houses and wads of dollar bills to the household god Ekeko, in the hope of receiving the real thing back in exchange.

24 Sucre Page **253** • Known as the White City, Bolivia's official capital is a jewel of colonial architecture and a lively university city that combines serene dignity with an easy provincial charm.

25 Cordillera Apolobamba Page **158** • The remote Cordillera Apolobamba offers some of the most spectacular scenery in Bolivia, and is also home to the Kallawayas, a secretive group of wandering herbalists whose healing abilities are famed throughout the Andes.



26 La Cha'lla Page **137** • Known as La Cha'lla, the ritual blessing of cars and trucks with libations of alcohol, bright streamers and confetti is a bizarre spectacle, best seen outside the cathedral in Copacabana.



27 Tinku Page **220** • Of all the indigenous traditions practised in the Bolivian Andes, perhaps none is as strange – or as bloody – as this form of ritual hand-to-hand combat between rival indigenous communities.

28 The Jesuit missions of Chiquitos Page **325** • The Jesuit mission churches of Chiquitos offer a splash of incongruous splendour in the midst of the wilderness, and a reminder of one of the more unusual episodes in Bolivia's colonial history.

29 Parque Nacional Noel Kempff Mercado Page **338** • Perhaps Bolivia's finest national park, with abundant wildlife, exuberant Amazonian rainforest and magnificent waterfalls tumbling down from the plateau that inspired Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Lost World*.

Basics

Basics

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Getting there

There are relatively few flights to Bolivia. At present, the only direct services to the country depart from Miami in the US and from neighbouring South American countries – the most frequent connections are from São Paulo in Brazil, Buenos Aires in Argentina and Lima in Peru. In Bolivia itself there are just two international airports, one in the capital La Paz and the other in Santa Cruz. The only alternative to flying is to make your way to South America and travel overland – a full rundown of land routes into Bolivia is given on p.28.

Airfares to Bolivia reflect the lack of competition, and are comparatively high. Prices depend on the season: high season runs from July to August and during Christmas and Easter; fares drop during the shoulder seasons (May–June & Oct) and even more during low season (Jan–March & Nov to late Dec).

Flights from the US and Canada

If you are travelling to Bolivia **from the US**, there are direct flights **from Miami** with American Airlines and with the Bolivian airline AeroSur to La Paz and Santa Cruz. Both routes take approximately seven hours and cost around US$900 return. Bolivia's other airline, Lloyd Aereo Boliviano, is currently suspended due to financial irregularities, but may resume flights between La Paz and Miami via Santa Cruz. There are regular daily flights to Miami from all major US cities.

Alternatively, it's possible to fly from other US cities to a South American gateway and then transfer onto a flight to La Paz. United Airlines and Delta fly direct to **São Paulo** from Chicago (10hr) and Atlanta (9hr) respectively. Delta also flies from Atlanta to **Santiago** (9hr 30min), while American Airlines goes to Santiago from Dallas (9hr 30min). Continental and LanChile fly to **Lima** from Houston (6hr 30min) and Los Angeles (8hr 30min) respectively, while **Buenos Aires** can be reached from Chicago with United Airlines (11hr 25min); from Atlanta with LAPA (10hr); from Los Angeles with American Airlines (13hr); or from New York with American Airlines (10hr 30min). Tickets to all these destinations cost around US$1000.

Passengers **from Canada** will have to fly via the US and connect with a flight to South America. There are direct flights to Miami **from Toronto** (3hr 30min) with Air Canada and American Airlines; from any other part of Canada you'll have to change planes at least once in Toronto or the US to reach Miami.

Flights from the UK and Ireland

There are no direct flights from Britain or Ireland to Bolivia. The three most direct routes go **via Miami** in the US, via **Buenos Aires** in Argentina or via **São Paulo** in Brazil. Both British Airways and American Airlines fly from London Heathrow to Miami daily – the most convenient routing is with British Airways to Miami (8hr 45min), then with American Airlines to La Paz (6hr 20min). The return fare from London to La Paz starts at £700 in low season, rising to over £900 in high season. There are also daily flights from Miami to La Paz via Santa Cruz on the Bolivian carrier, Aerosur.

Airport Tax

Passengers departing Bolivia on international flights must pay a US$25 airport tax in cash dollars or bolivianos, payable at a separate kiosk after checking in. If you can't pay you won't be allowed to board your plane, so make sure you set money aside for this. The departure tax on domestic flights is about US$1.50, payable in bolivianos.

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Flying via a neighbouring country in South America is more expensive. The fastest routings are with Varig or British Airways from Heathrow to La Paz **via São Paulo**; the flight takes around twelve hours, plus a three-hour stopover in São Paulo. British Airways also flies daily to **Buenos Aires**, though at present you'll have to wait several hours for a connecting AeroSur flight to Bolivia. Aerolineas Argentinas flies daily to Santa Cruz from Heathrow, although flights go via Madrid and Buenos Aires, a total journey of around 21 hours. It's also possible to fly to Bolivia via Madrid and **Lima or Santiago** with the Spanish airline Iberia and then pick up an onward flight to La Paz or Santa Cruz. All flights via South America cost £600–800 in low season; £700–900 in high season.

If you're coming **from Manchester or Glasgow**, you can get a free transfer to London Heathrow on American Airlines to connect with their daily flight to Miami; flying with British Airways will add £30–50 to the fare. Alternatively, you can fly from Manchester to Miami via Washington with British Midland, or from Glasgow to Miami via Newark with Continental, though both these routes take around thirteen hours.

The most convenient routings **from Ireland** all entail flying through London. **From Dublin** you can fly to Miami via London Heathrow with American Airlines, or to Miami via London Gatwick with Continental. **From Belfast**, British Midland services to London Heathrow connect with British Airways and American Airlines flights to Miami. Fares from Ireland are around £40–100 more than from London.

Flights from Australia and New Zealand

The fastest way to reach South America **from Australasia** is to fly with either Qantas or Aerolineas Argentina from Sydney or Auckland **to Buenos Aires**, from where there are onward services to La Paz (see p.30 for details). The journey takes around sixteen hours and tickets cost approximately A$2000. It's also possible to fly **to Santiago** via Tahiti and Easter Island with Qantas/Lan Chile, but the flight takes 23 hours, with lengthy stopovers.

Flying **from Australia via the US**, the quickest route is from either Sydney or Melbourne via Los Angeles and Miami. The American Airlines' service flies daily, arriving in Miami in time to connect with the American Airlines flight to La Paz. Fares are approximately A$3000. **From New Zealand**, United Airlines flies from Auckland to Los Angeles daily, from where you can pick up a connecting flight to Miami, which arrives in time to connect with the American Airlines' flight to Bolivia.

Travelling overland from neighbouring countries

You can enter Bolivia **by land** on regular bus services from all five of the countries with which it shares a border. The most widely used and easiest route is from Puno in **Peru** on the west shore of Lago Titicaca, via the Yunguyo–Kasani border crossing near Copacabana, or via Desaguadero, south of the lake (see p.141); both these crossings are an easy bus ride (3–4hr) from La Paz.

From **Brazil**, the main entrance point is at Quijjaro (see p.308), in the far east of Bolivia close to the Brazilian city of Corumbá, which is the main base for visiting the Pantanal wetlands and is well connected

Fly less – stay longer! Travel and climate change

Climate change is the single biggest issue facing our planet. It is caused by a build-up in the atmosphere of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, which are emitted by many sources – including planes. Already, flights account for around 3–4 percent of human-induced global warming: that figure may sound small, but it is rising year on year and threatens to counteract the progress made by reducing greenhouse emissions in other areas.

Rough Guides regard travel, overall, as a global benefit, and feel strongly that the advantages to developing economies are important, as are the opportunities for greater contact and awareness among peoples. But we all have a responsibility to limit our personal “carbon footprint”. That means giving thought to how often we fly and what we can do to redress the harm that our trips create.

Flying and climate change

Pretty much every form of motorized travel generates CO_2, but planes are particularly bad offenders, releasing large volumes of greenhouse gases at altitudes where their impact is far more harmful. Flying also allows us to travel much further than we would contemplate doing by road or rail, so the emissions attributable to each passenger become truly shocking. For example, one person taking a return flight between Europe and California produces the equivalent impact of 2.5 tonnes of CO_2 – similar to the yearly output of the average UK car.

Less harmful planes may evolve but it will be decades before they replace the current fleet – which could be too late for avoiding climate chaos. In the meantime, there are limited options for concerned travellers: to reduce the amount we travel by air (take fewer trips, stay longer!), to avoid night flights (when plane contrails trap heat from Earth but can’t reflect sunlight back to space), and to make the trips we do take “climate neutral” via a carbon offset scheme.

Carbon offset schemes

Offset schemes run by Ⓦ **www.climatecare.org**, Ⓦ **www.carbonneutral.com** and others allow you to “neutralize” the greenhouse gases that you are responsible for releasing. Their websites have simple calculators that let you work out the impact of any flight. Once that’s done, you can pay to fund projects that will reduce future carbon emissions by an equivalent amount (such as the distribution of low-energy light bulbs and cooking stoves in developing countries). Please take the time to visit our website and make your trip climate neutral.

Ⓦ **www.roughguides.com/climatechange**

to the rest of the country. From Quijjaro you can travel to Santa Cruz by train, a journey of around 24 hours. There’s another minor land crossing from Brazil in the far east of Bolivia at San Matías, a day’s journey by bus from the town of San Ignacio in Chiquitania (see p.325). You can also enter Bolivia from Brazil at several points along the northern border in Amazonia, most notably from Brasiléia to Cobija (see p.383) and Guajarámerim to Guayaramerin.

From **Chile** there are three main routes, all of them passing through spectacular Andean scenery. You can travel to La Paz by bus along the well-paved road from Arica on the Pacific Coast via the border crossing of Tambo Quemado (see p.185); take the twice weekly train from Calama in Chile to Uyuni (see p.224); or cross the border at Laguna Verde in the far south of the Reserva Eduardo Avaroa on a jeep tour organized from the Chilean town of San Pedro de Atacama, a route which will bring you to Uyuni (see p.224).

From **Argentina** there are two straightforward crossings: from La Quiaca in Argentina to Villazón in the southern Altiplano (see p.237), from where there are road and rail connections north to Tupiza, Uyuni and Oruro; and from Pocitos in Argentina to Yacuiba in the Chaco (see p.347), from where you can travel by road and rail north to Santa Cruz or by road west to Tarija. There's also a minor crossing at Bermejo, south of Tarija.

From **Paraguay**, in the dry season (May–Sept) at least, you can enter Bolivia on the arduous two- to-three-day bus journey from Asunción to Santa Cruz along the rough Chaco road (see p.346), which crosses the great wilderness of thornbrush and scrub that separates the two countries.

Airlines, agents and operators

Online booking

ⓦ **www.expedia.co.uk** (in UK) ⓦ **www.expedia.com** (in US) ⓦ **www.expedia.ca** (in Canada)
ⓦ **www.lastminute.com** (in UK)
ⓦ **www.opodo.co.uk** (in UK)
ⓦ **www.orbitz.com** (in US)
ⓦ **www.travelocity.co.uk** (in UK) ⓦ **www.travelocity.com** (in US) ⓦ **www.travelocity.ca** (in Canada)
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AeroSur US ⓣ1-866-903-2885, ⓦwww.aerosur.com.
Air Canada ⓣ1-888/247-2262, UK ⓣ0871/220 1111, Republic of Ireland ⓣ01/679 3958, Australia ⓣ1300/655 767, New Zealand ⓣ0508/747 767, ⓦwww.aircanada.com.
American Airlines ⓣ1-800/433-7300, UK ⓣ0845/7789 789, Republic of Ireland ⓣ01/602 0550, Australia ⓣ1800/673 486, New Zealand ⓣ0800/445 442, ⓦwww.aa.com.
Avianca US ⓣ1-800/284-2622, ⓦwww.avianca.com.
British Airways US and Canada ⓣ1-800/AIRWAYS, UK ⓣ0870/850 9850, Republic of Ireland ⓣ1890/626 747, Australia ⓣ1300/767 177, New Zealand ⓣ09/966 9777, South Africa ⓣ114/418 600, ⓦwww.ba.com.
Continental Airlines US and Canada ⓣ1-800/523-3273, UK ⓣ0845/607 6760, Republic of Ireland ⓣ1890/925 252, Australia ⓣ02/9244 2242, New Zealand ⓣ09/308 3350, International ⓣ1800/2310856, ⓦwww.continental.com.
Delta US and Canada ⓣ1-800/221-1212, UK ⓣ0845/600 0950, Republic of Ireland ⓣ1850/882 031 or 01/407 3165, Australia ⓣ1300/302 849, New Zealand ⓣ09/9772232, ⓦwww.delta.com.
LAB (Lloyd Aereo Boliviano) Airlines US ⓣ1-800/337-0918, UK ⓣ0845/838 7945, ⓦwww.labairlines.co.uk or www.labairlines.com.bo. Service is currently suspended, but may resume – please check their website for updates.
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Qantas Airways US and Canada ⓣ1-800/227-4500, UK ⓣ0845/774 7767, Republic of Ireland ⓣ01/407 3278, Australia ⓣ13 13 13, New Zealand ⓣ0800/808 767 or 09/357 8900, SA ⓣ11/441 8550, ⓦwww.qantas.com.
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United Airlines US ⓣ1-800/UNITED-1, UK ⓣ0845/844 4777, Australia ⓣ13 17 77, ⓦwww.united.com.
Varig US and Canada ⓣ1-800/GO-VARIG, UK ⓣ0870/120 3020, ⓦwww.varig.com.

Agents and operators

Adventure Life ⓣ800/344-6118, ⓦwww.adventure-life.com. Small, personal organization with a community focus. Trips include an eleven-day tour of Sucre, Potosí and the Salar de Uyuni, and seven days in the Amazon staying at the Albergue Ecológico Chalalán.

Andean Treks ⓣ800/683-8148, ⓦwww.andeantreks.com. Camping and trekking tours to Bolivia in conjunction with Peru or Chile, plus a fourteen-day llama-trekking trip through the Cordillera Real.

Audley Latin America ⓣ01869/276210, ⓦwww.audleytravel.com. Classy tailor-made trips including two- and three-week tours of Bolivia, visiting La Paz, Potosí, Sucre, Santa Cruz and the Salar de Uyuni.

Condor Journeys and Adventures ⓣ01422/822068, ⓦwww.condorjourneys-adventures.com. Imaginative ecotourism company with twelve different themed tours, ranging from two to eighteen days and covering most parts of the country.

ebookers UK ⓣ0800/082 3000, Republic of Ireland ⓣ01/488 3507, ⓦwww.ebookers.com. ⓦwww.ebookers.ie. Low fares on an extensive selection of scheduled flights and package deals.

Explore Bolivia ⓣ877/708-8810, ⓦwww.explorebolivia.com. Bolivian travel experts with an extensive range of activity and nature trips – including white-water rafting on the Río Tuichi, kayaking and mountain biking – with an emphasis on remote places.

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Getting around

Bolivia's topography, size and lack of basic infrastructure means that getting around is often a challenge. Only about five percent of Bolivia's road network is paved – most highways are in very poor condition and are kept open only through constant labour against floods, landslides and mud, and by the determination, skill and sheer bloody-mindedness of bus and lorry drivers. Despite the difficulties, however, travelling through the country's varied and stunning landscapes is also one of the most enjoyable aspects of a visit to Bolivia, and the pleasure of many places lies as much in the getting there as in the destination itself.

Most Bolivians travel around the country by **bus**, as these go pretty much everywhere and are extremely good value. When there are no buses, they travel on **camiones** (lorries), which are slower, much less comfortable and only slightly cheaper, but often go to places no other transport reaches. The much-reduced **train** network covers only a small fraction of the country, but offers a generally more comfortable and sedate (though not necessarily faster or more reliable) service. In parts of the Amazon lowlands **river boats** are still the main means of getting around, but only in areas the road

Bolivia Road Distance Chart

	Cochab	La Paz	Oruro	Potosí
Cochabamba	x	383	210	520
La Paz	383	x	229	539
Oruro	210	229	x	310
Potosí	530	539	310	x
Rurrenabaque	809	426	736	1046
Santa Cruz	473	858	683	774
Sucre	366	701	472	162
Tarija	888	907	678	368
Trinidad	985	602	812	1112
Uyuni	739	552	323	200

network has not reached: moving people and goods by bus or lorry is a lot cheaper than by motorized canoe.

Though few Bolivians can afford it, **air travel** is a great way of saving a day or two of arduous cross-country travel, and most of the major cities are served by regular internal flights. The approximate journey times and frequencies of all services are listed in the Travel Details at the end of each chapter, but these should be treated with caution to say the least: the idea of a fixed timetable would strike most Bolivians as rather ridiculous. Buying or hiring a **car** is a possibility, but given the state of the roads in many areas and the long distances between towns, it's an adventurous way to travel and doesn't guarantee you'll reach your destination any faster.

By bus

Known as *buses* or *flotas*, Bolivia's **buses** are run by a variety of private companies and ply all the main routes in the country, moving passengers at low cost over great distances despite often appalling road conditions.

Cities and larger towns have **bus terminals** – known as *terminales terrestres* or *terminales de buses* – from which buses to most (but often not all) destinations leave. Departing passengers usually have to pay a small fee for the use of the terminal; you either buy a ticket from a kiosk on the terminal floor or pay an official as you get on the bus.

The terminals usually have some kind of **information** office, but even so the number of different companies operating the same route can make it difficult at times to work out departure times and frequencies. If in doubt, taxi drivers usually have a good grasp of the timing of buses to different destinations and where they depart from. For less frequently used routes it's worth buying a **ticket** in advance, but there's no need on busier routes: ticket touts will usually hustle you onto the next departing bus or point you in the direction of the company that serves your destination. Unfortunately, buses on many longer-distance routes travel only at night so Bolivian travellers can visit other cities without paying for accommodation, but it means you miss out on the scenery.

The major long-distance intercity routes are served by more modern and comfortable buses, often equipped with reclining seats and televisions showing Hollywood blockbusters. Fierce competition between companies on these routes keeps prices very low, and last-minute discounts are often available. Some routes are also served by comparatively luxurious overnight **sleeper buses** (*bus-camas*), which have extra leg-room and seats that recline to the horizontal. These cost about fifty percent more, but are well worth it.

Most buses, however, are much older and in poor condition, with broken windows, bald tyres and dodgy engines. Where there are several different companies it's worth having a look at their vehicles and going with whichever one appears to have the most modern models. Breakdowns are frequent, but fortunately many drivers are masters of mechanical improvisation.

Rurre	S Cruz	Sucre	Tarija	Trinidad	Uyuni
809	473	366	888	985	739
426	858	701	907	602	552
736	683	472	678	812	323
1046	774	162	368	1112	200
x	930	1208	1414	380	1059
930	x	612	703	550	1212
1208	612	x	530	1162	362
1414	703	530	x	1253	625
380	550	1162	1253	x	1135
1059	1212	362	625	1135	x

More local routes are served by smaller buses and minibuses known as **micros**; on some you also have the choice of travelling in **collective taxis**, which charge slightly more but are faster, more comfortable and depart with greater frequency. Other than sleeper-buses and some more upmarket long-distance services, Bolivian buses stop anywhere for anyone, even if they're only travelling a few kilometres, until every available crack of space has been filled with people, luggage and livestock – and even then the driver's assistant will insist there's still room for one more passenger.

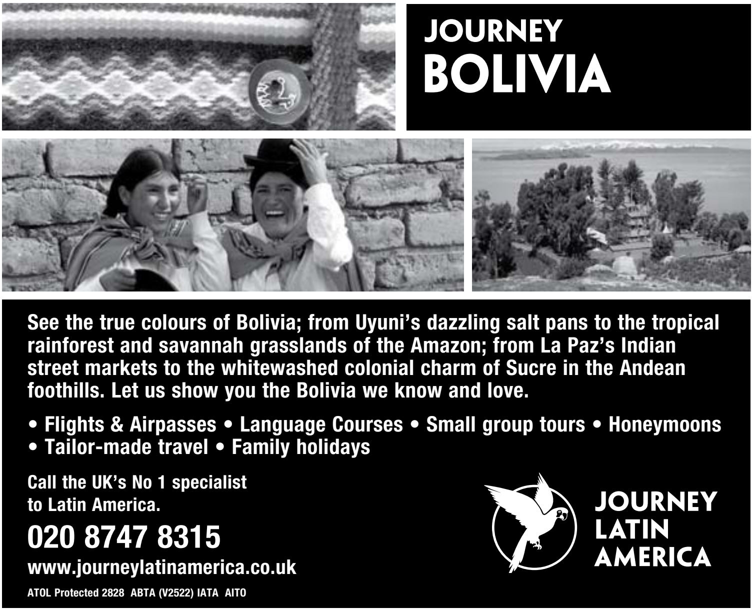
Because of the poor conditions of most roads and many vehicles, **journey times** are unpredictable, and you should always be prepared for major delays. In the rainy season, buses can arrive days rather than hours late, and travelling with a tight schedule is a recipe for disappointment. Most buses stop for regular meal breaks (often with infuriating frequency), and food and drink sellers offer their wares at the roadside at every opportunity, but given the unpredictability of travel it's worth carrying some food and drink with you. When travelling in the highlands, you should have warm clothing to hand: even if it's hot at the start of your journey, you may climb over high passes where temperatures are much lower. If travelling by night, keep a blanket or sleeping bag and woollen hat to hand, as it can get bitterly cold, and heated buses are virtually unheard of. If you can, avoid sitting at the back of the bus, as on bumpy roads (which is virtually all of them) this is where you'll get bounced around the most.

Unless it's small enough to keep with you inside the bus, your **luggage** will be put on the roof, at the back or in a locked compartment underneath the vehicle. This is usually pretty safe, but it's still worth keeping an eye out at each stop to make sure your bag isn't carried off, whether by accident or design. With better-organized companies you may be given a ticket with which to reclaim your luggage at the end of the journey, which also entitles you to minor compensation if your bags are lost or carried off by another passenger. Some travellers like to chain their bags to the roof, and you shouldn't be shy about climbing up to check yours if you're feeling nervous about its security. Even if it's under a tarpaulin on the roof or in a luggage compartment, it's a good idea to cover your luggage with a nylon sack (which you can pick up in any market) to protect it from dust, rain, engine oil and the prying fingers of other travellers.

By plane

Flying in Bolivia is a good way of avoiding exhausting overland journeys and saving time; it's also relatively inexpensive, with most internal flights costing US$40–100, and offers splendid bird's-eye views of the high Andes or the endless green expanse of the Amazon. La Paz, Santa Cruz, Sucre and Cochabamba are all connected by daily flights, and there are also frequent services to Tarija, Trinidad, and a number of remote towns in the Amazon and the eastern lowlands, some of which are inaccessible by road for much of the year.

There's currently only one main commercial carrier, **AeroSur** (Ⓦwww.aerosur.com). Its



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main rival, **Lloyd Aéreo Boliviano** (ⓦwww.labairlines.com), had all services suspended in May 2007 due to a financial scandal. A smaller operator, **Amaszonas** (ⓦwww.Amaszonas.com), operates flights from La Paz and Santa Cruz to the main towns in the Bolivian Amazon, above all the ecotourism centre of Rurrenabaque.

The Bolivian air force also operates passenger services under its commercial arm **Transportes Aereo Militar** (TAM ☎02/2841884). TAM is almost as reliable and somewhat cheaper than the two commercial airlines, and flies to some out-of-the-way places not served by the others, as well as between most of the main cities. All three airlines have offices in the cities they serve, though you can also buy tickets from almost any travel agency for only a small extra charge, which is often faster and more convenient (especially in La Paz). The busier routes should be booked at least several days in advance, and it's important to reconfirm a couple of days before departure, as overbooking is not uncommon. Flights are often cancelled or delayed, and sometimes even leave earlier than scheduled, especially in the Amazon, where the weather can be a problem. If passengers haven't shown up twenty minutes or so before departure, their seats can be given to someone else, so it's important to turn up on time. Baggage allowance on internal flights is usually 15kg, with an additional charge payable on any excess.

Some particularly remote regions, such as the Parque Nacional Noel Kempff Mercado, are also served by light aircraft, such as five-seater Cessnas, which are an expensive but exciting way to travel.

By taxi, moto-taxi and micro

Taxis can be found anywhere at any time in almost any town and offer a cheap and safe way to get around. In Bolivia, anyone can turn their car into a taxi just by sticking a sign in the window, and many people in cities work as part-time taxi drivers to supplement their incomes. There are also **radio-taxis**, which are marked as such and can be called by phone; they tend to cost a little more.

Fares tend to be fixed in each city or town. A trip within any city centre will rarely cost more than US$1, though there's an occasional tendency to overcharge foreigners, so it's best to agree a price before you set off. Often, fares are charged per passenger rather than for the vehicle as a whole, and it's not unusual to share a taxi with strangers heading in the same general direction. You can also hire taxis by the day or half-day to go sightseeing; with a little bargaining this can actually be an inexpensive way of seeing a lot in a short time, especially if the cost is shared between several passengers.

As the name suggests, **moto-taxis** are motorcycles used as taxis, and are most frequently found in remote cities and towns in the lowlands. In cities like Trinidad, they're by far the most common form of transport. As a passenger you ride pillion, with your backpack on or sitting in front of the driver on the gas tank. Travelling this way is cheap, fast and only slightly frightening. Most moto-taxi drivers are happy to rent their machines out for about US$1.50 an hour if you leave your passport as a deposit, but beware that riding a motorbike in Bolivia is dangerous and is unlikely to be covered by your travel insurance.

Micros are small Japanese-made minibuses that have almost completely replaced larger buses as the main form of urban public transport in Bolivia. A trip in a micro costs a boliviano or less, and they run with great frequency along fixed routes with their major destinations written on placards on the windscreen and shouted out by the driver's assistant – usually a small child. With extra seats fitted in their already small interiors, they're pretty cramped; if you need extra leg room, try to sit in the front seat next to the driver. Large estate cars – referred to as **trufis** or **colectivos** – are sometimes used in place of *micros*.

By lorry

The heavy-goods **lorries** (*camiones*) are the other mainstay of Bolivian land transport, and sometimes the only option in remote or little-visited regions. Most carry passengers to supplement their income from carrying goods, and some passengers actually prefer them because they're cheaper and have room for lots of luggage. On a good day, travelling in the back of an open-top truck with the wind in your face and 360° views is a fantastic experience – for the first hour at least. After that the dust, hard wooden seats (when there are any seats at all), exposure to the elements and extremely bumpy ride start to take their toll. Lorries are also slower and generally more dangerous than buses, and stop more frequently. Still, travelling by lorry is a quintessential Bolivian experience.

The best place to find a lorry is around any town's market areas or at the police checkpoints (*trancas*) at the edge of town; most also stop for passengers who flag them down at the side of the road. This is the closest you'll get to **hitching** in Bolivia, and you will always be expected to pay something for the ride; private cars are few and far between outside towns and rarely pick up hitchers, and in any case hitching a lift in them is risky. For shorter journeys in remote areas, smaller pick-up trucks, known as **camionetas**, also carry passengers; these share the same drawbacks and pleasures as *camiones*, but are slightly faster and less bumpy.

By train

Once a proud symbol of the country's tin-fuelled march to modernity, Bolivia's **railway** network, like the mining industry that spawned it, is now a shadow of its former self. There's occasional talk of reopening the line from La Paz to Oruro and to Arica on the Pacific coast of Chile, but for the moment only two networks still function, each run by a different private company. The **Ferrocarril Andino or Occidental (Ⓦwww.fca.com.bo)** runs passenger trains from Oruro south across the Altiplano via Uyuni and Tupiza to Villazón on the Argentine border (see p.248). From Uyuni, another line, served once a week, runs southeast to Calama in Chile. The scenery on both these Altiplano routes is magnificent. The company has also recently reopened a service between Sucre and Potosi.

The **Ferrocarril Oriental (Ⓦwww.ferroviariaoriental.com)** runs two lines: one from Santa Cruz east to the Brazilian border at Quijjaro; the other from Santa

Cruz south to Yacuiba in the Chaco on the Argentine border. Trains on both these long routes are slow and unreliable, and the lowlands scenery is monotonous: the Santa Cruz to Quijjarro route is known as the "Train of Death", not because it's dangerous but because it's such a boring ride.

By boat

Although Bolivia is a landlocked country, there are still several regions – particularly Lago Titicaca and the Amazon – where water is still the best way if getting around. There are no longer any scheduled passenger services between Bolivia and Peru on **Lago Titicaca**, but several upmarket tour agencies run hydrofoil and catamaran cruises on the lake, and smaller passenger launches run between Copacabana and the Isla del Sol.

River boats were for a long time the only means of transport in the Bolivian **Amazon**, but their use has declined rapidly with the expansion of the road network in the region. There are still plenty of river trips you can make, though, and travelling by boat is the ideal way to experience the rainforest. There are two main forms of river transport. **Dugout canoes** powered by outboard motors are still the workhorses of the back- country river network and the only real way to get deep enough into the jungle to see the wildlife. Tour agencies use these to take groups into protected areas like the Parque Nacional Madidi and irregular passenger services operate along some rivers. Alternatively, you can hire a canoe and its boatman for a few days – this means searching around the riverbank and negotiating, and the high fuel consumption of outboard motors means it won't be cheap.

The second (and much more economic) form of river transport are the larger **cargo boats** that ply the two main water routes not yet supplanted by roads: the Río Mamoré, between Trinidad and Guayaramerin on the Brazilian frontier, and the Río Ichilo, between Trinidad and Puerto Villaroel in the Chapare. Though generally far from comfortable, these slow-moving vessels allow passengers to hitch hammocks above the deck for a small fee and are a great way to see the Amazon if you're not in a hurry.

By car

If you're short on time or want to get to some really out-of-the-way destinations, **renting a car** is a possibility, but few travellers ever do. It's usually easier and not much more expensive to hire a taxi or *camioneta* to drive you around for a day or longer.

Outside towns, most roads are unpaved and in very poor condition, so **four-wheel drive** (4WD) is essential. **Petrol** (gasoline) stations are few and far between and breakdown services even scarcer, so you should fill your tank whenever you can, carry extra fuel, and take food, drink and warm clothing in case you get stuck. Always carry your passport, driving licence and the registration documents of the vehicle when driving, as **police checks** are frequent, and any infringement will usually result in an on-the-spot fine, whether official or not. Small **tolls** are also charged on most roads. **Speed limits** are irregularly posted, but the speed is usually dictated by the state of the road. Most Bolivians regularly ignore traffic lights and don't indicate when turning, and some drive at night without lights. Vehicles drive on the right, though this rule is obviated on some mountain roads when the vehicle going uphill drives on the right and has priority.

Virtually none of the major international **car rental companies** is represented in Bolivia, but you'll find local rental companies in all the major cities: see the relevant listings section in each city account for details. Rental costs vary but are generally a bit less than in Europe and the US. You pay a flat fee of US$25–40 per day, plus about US$0.50 extra for each kilometre you drive; 4WDs cost about double. You'll need to be over 25 to rent a car, and leave a major credit card or large cash deposit as security; you'll also require some kind of insurance – most rental agencies can arrange this, though read the small print carefully.

In several lowland towns, such as Trinidad, Guayaramerin and Riberalta, it's also possible to hire **mopeds** and **motorbikes** by the hour or by the day, leaving your passport as a deposit – a good way of heading off into the back country for a day. Bikes typically cost about US$1.50 an hour.

Addresses

Addresses are usually written with just the street name (and often just the surname if the street is named after a person), followed by the number – for example, “Paredes 704” rather than “Calle Max Paredes 704”. Often, however, numbers are not used, and the nearest intersection is given instead – for example, “Illampu con Comercio”. Note also that street numbers in Bolivia do not always run consecutively: number 6 could easily be between numbers 2 and 4.

Cycling

Outside La Paz, **bicycles** are rarely available to rent, and those that are aren’t usually suitable for extended riding. For proper touring, you’ll need to bring your own bike from home; airlines are usually happy to carry them if they’re packed in bike boxes with the pedals removed. Given the state of the roads, a mountain bike is better than a conventional touring bike. Bring a comprehensive tool kit and a selection of essential spare parts.

The roads of the Bolivian Andes are ideal for **downhill mountain biking**, and the country is home to some of the world’s best downhill rides, including descents of over 3500m in one day. Several agencies in La Paz lead guided mountain bike trips in which you’re taken to a high pass by bus and picked up at the bottom after riding downhill all day. See p.114 for more details.

By organized tour

Although relatively expensive, **organized tours** offer a quick and effortless way to see some of Bolivia’s popular attractions; they’re also a good way of visiting remote sites that are otherwise difficult to reach. In addition, many adventure tour companies both in Bolivia and abroad offer excellent and increasingly exciting itineraries, ranging from mountain climbing, trekking, mountain biking and wildlife safaris to less strenuous city tours and countryside excursions. Tours tend to cost US$30–50 per person per day, depending on the nature of the trip, the degree of comfort and the number of people going along.

Most **tour agencies** are based in La Paz (see p.114), where you can arrange almost any trip in the country, but for the more popular wilderness excursions it’s easier and cheaper to arrange things with local operators: in Uyuni for the Salar de Uyuni and Reserva Eduardo Avaroa, for example, and in Rurrenabaque for the Pampas del Yacuma and Parque Nacional Madidi. Relevant agencies are listed in the guide under each destination.

Accommodation

Accommodation in Bolivia is generally good value, but the standard is not particularly high. In the larger cities you'll find a broad range of places to stay, up to and including luxurious international hotels charging well over US$100 a night. In smaller towns, however, there's not much choice, particularly in the mid- and upper price ranges, though there are usually plenty of decent but totally unexceptional budget places.

Room rates usually represent excellent value for money: budget travellers will almost always be able to find a double room, often with a private bathroom, in a reasonably clean and comfortable hotel for around US$10, while in the mid-range you'll find some very nice hotels for a fraction of the price a similar place would cost in Europe or the US. Room rates vary according to **season**: in areas popular with tourists, room rates rise during the high season (May to September), and prices in any town can double or treble during a major fiesta. In addition, room rates in resort towns popular with Bolivians increase at the weekend. (These are also the only circumstances in which **reserving a room** in advance is necessary). Prices also vary by **region**: accommodation in big cities tends to cost more (Santa Cruz is particularly expensive), whereas smaller towns that see a lot of budget travellers – Coroico, Copacabana, Rurrenabaque – tend to have a good range of inexpensive places to stay.

Accommodation names – *hotel*, *hostal*, *residencial* and *alojamiento* – mean relatively little in Bolivia. Virtually all upmarket accommodation will call itself a **hotel**, but then many basic places do so as well. Smaller and cheaper hotels – also known as **hostales**, **alojamientos** or **residenciales** – tend to offer basic rooms with shared bathrooms only, with rates charged per person rather than per room, but they still vary widely in price, cleanliness and comfort. **Cabañas** are self-contained cabins or bungalows, sometimes with their own kitchenettes, usually found away from big

Accommodation price codes

Unless otherwise indicated, accommodation in this book is coded according to the categories below, based on the price of a **double room in high season**.

Budget accommodation (①–③) tends to be pretty spartan, with small, sparsely furnished rooms, although a number of high-profile hostels have raised the bar in the last year or so. Pay a little more – about US$13 and upwards for a double room – and you can stay in a decent **mid-range** hotel (④–⑥), where rooms tend to be larger, with more comfortable beds, better decor, and extras like towels and cable television. In the last couple of years especially, a number of great value mid-range options have also sprung up, obviating budget choices for all but the most cost-conscious, or those actively seeking out the backpacking scene. Ask to see a few rooms before you check in and try to choose one that gets some sunlight, as this makes a big difference in temperature at this altitude. Heating is only available in the **top-range** hotels (⑦–⑨), but most places have hot water – in budget places it's worth checking to make sure it's working.

① under US$5
② US$5–10
③ US$10–15
④ US$15–25
⑤ US$25–40
⑥ US$40–60
⑦ US$60–80
⑧ US$80–100
⑨ US$100 and over

cities, particularly in resort towns popular with Bolivians. Note that a **motel** is not an inexpensive roadside hotel, but a place where unmarried couples go to have sex, while a **pension** is a cheap place to eat, rather than somewhere to stay.

Hotels

The **cheapest** places to stay tend to be found around bus terminals. At their most basic they offer nothing more than bare, box-like rooms with a bed and shared bathroom, and can be far from clean, though for around US$10 you should expect a clean and reasonably comfortable double room. Many budget places offer a choice between private and shared bathroom – taking the latter can be a good way to save money. Some also have their own restaurant or cafeteria and include breakfast in the price, though this is by no means universal.

Mid-range accommodation (US$15 and upwards for a double room) should offer greater comfort, pleasant decor, efficient hot water, towels and soap, and extras like television. For US$25 or so you'll find some very pleasant hotels indeed, though you'll need to choose carefully – more expensive doesn't necessarily mean better, and some places are simply characterless and overpriced business hotels. At the **top end** of the scale (US$50 and upwards) there are some beautiful old colonial mansions which have been converted into delightful hotels, as well as more staid modern places aimed primarily at business people.

There's no standard or widely used **rating system**, so other than the information given in this book, the only way to tell whether a place is suitable or not is to have a look around – most proprietors don't mind if you do this. Even if you like the look of the place it's usually worth asking to see a few different rooms and choosing one you like rather than just accepting the first you're offered. There's usually some flexibility in all price ranges, so a little haggling is always worth a try, especially when the hotel seems fairly empty or if you're in a group: the phrase "*Tiene un cuarto más barato?*" ("Do you have a cheaper room?") is useful. The cheapest places often charge per person, but otherwise **single rooms** tend to cost as much as or only slightly less than double rooms. Rooms with double beds (*cama matrimonial*) usually cost less than those with two beds.

Even in the coldest highland cities, **heating** is a luxury found only in the more expensive hotels. Try to get a room that receives some direct sunlight during the day, as this can really warm things up, and don't hesitate to ask for extra blankets if you're cold at night. In the lowlands, heat rather than cold is often a problem. All but the cheapest rooms are equipped with a fan, and many places offer the option of air-conditioning, though this costs considerably more and older systems can be very noisy. In the lowlands, you should also check whether the windows of your room are screened against mosquitoes or if the bed is equipped with a net.

All but the cheapest places have **hot water**, but the reliability and effectiveness of water-heating systems varies considerably. Most common are the individual electric heaters that you'll find attached to the tops of showers; some of these work well, but most don't: don't touch the apparatus while the water is running unless you want an electric shock. These electric heaters work in inverse proportion to the amount of water flowing – the less water, the warmer it is – and so require a delicate balance to get right. The gas-heated systems (known as *calefóns*) found in more upmarket places are usually better, though the hot water can run out if the tanks are too small.

Many hotels have a **strong box** where you can lock up your valuables – this is usually safer than carrying them on the street at night, though you should count cash carefully before handing it in, and ask for a receipt. Many places will also store luggage for you for days or even weeks while you go off around the country, often free of charge or for just a small fee.

Camping

With so few designated campsites in the country and budget accommodation so inexpensive, few travellers bother **camping** in Bolivia, unless they're exploring the country's wilderness areas. Outside cities and towns, however, you can camp almost everywhere, usually for free. Be aware, though, that in the highlands it gets extremely cold at night, while in the lowlands, mosquitoes can be a real problem if your tent isn't screened. In the rainforest, a hammock combined with a fitted mosquito net and a tarpaulin to keep off the rain allows you to camp out comfortably pretty much anywhere.

When looking for a **place to camp**, it's usually okay to set up your tent in fields beyond the outskirts of settlements, but you should ask permission from the nearest house first. In wilderness areas where there's no one around to ask, you can camp freely. On the more popular trekking routes you may be asked for a small fee of a dollar or two by local villagers; though not official, refusing this can lead to problems and disputes, and it's not unreasonable for the locals to expect to make something from wealthy foreigners camping on their land. If you don't want to pay you could try offering a gift of leftover supplies, or just camp away from the village. Though **attacks** on trekkers are rare, you're obviously vulnerable if camping out alone: it's best to camp with at least one other person, and women shouldn't camp unless accompanied by men.

In some **national parks** and other protected wilderness areas you'll find shelters – called *albergues* or *refugios* – where you can stay for a small fee, often in the *campamentos* used by the park guards. These range from relatively comfortable rooms with beds, mosquito nets and bathrooms, to very basic huts where you can stretch out your sleeping bag or string a hammock. Rudimentary cooking facilities and running water are usually available.

Specialist **camping equipment** is expensive and difficult to come by in Bolivia, being sold only in a few shops in La Paz and Santa Cruz, so you should bring all you need from home. If you do need to buy stuff, the best place to look is often from other travellers wanting to get rid of equipment they no longer need – check out the notice boards in popular budget hotels in La Paz.

Food and drink

You won't find much in the way of sophisticated cuisine in Bolivia, but in most places it's easy to get a decent and filling meal, and there are some interesting national and local specialities. The style of eating and drinking varies considerably between Bolivia's three main geographical regions: the Altiplano, the highland valleys and the tropical lowlands. These differences reflect both the different produce commonly available in each region and the different cultural traditions of their inhabitants. Though the differences are fading with the growth of migration and commerce, every region has *comidas típicas* (traditional dishes), which include some of the highlights of Bolivian cuisine.

Restaurants

All larger towns in Bolivia have a fair selection of **restaurants** (spelt the same way as in English, without the extra "e" at the end used in most Spanish-speaking countries). Almost all offer a set lunch, or **almuerzo**, consisting of a substantial soup (*sopa*) and a main course (*segundo*), usually made up of rice, potatoes, some form of meat or chicken, and a little bit of salad. Sometimes all this will be preceded by a small savoury appetiser and followed by a sweet dessert. Coffee, teas or a soft drink may also be included. Usually costing between US$1 and US$3, these set lunches are enormously filling and represent great value for money. Many restaurants also offer a set dinner, or **cena**, in the evening. In addition, most have a range of à la carte main dishes (*platos extras*) available throughout the day – these are usually substantial meat dishes like steak, and rarely cost more than US$3–4. In smaller towns the choice is much more limited, and often the simple set *almuerzo* and *cena* will be the only meal on offer.

In more upmarket restaurants, you may find yourself paying US$5 for a main course, but for this you should expect a pretty good meal, and even in the best restaurants in La Paz or Santa Cruz few dishes cost more than about US$10. **Tipping** is not generally expected, but is always welcome, particularly in the more expensive restaurants, where a small service charge may anyway be added to your bill. No additional tax is charged on meals, but there is often a cover charge in restaurants with live music performances, known as **peñas**, though they may not tell you this until you ask for the bill.

Ordinary restaurants rarely offer much in the way of **vegetarian food**; in out-of-the-way places, vegetarians may find themselves eating rather a lot of fried eggs – often the only alternative to meat that chefs can think of. The situation changes a great deal in popular travellers' haunts, where international food is more and more common, and salads and vegetarian dishes are widely available. Although as a landlocked country Bolivia is obviously not the place to come for seafood, **fish** features regularly on menus. Lago Titicaca produces an abundant harvest of succulent *trucha* (trout) and *pejerrey* (kingfish), while native fish are abundant in the rivers of the lowlands: the tastiest is the juicy white fish known as *surubí*.

Most cities have at least one **Chinese restaurant**, which usually offers a far wider range of vegetarian dishes as well as some welcome variety if you're bored with Bolivian food. **Pizzerias** are also fairly widespread and very popular with Bolivians, though they're relatively expensive. Another reliable option throughout Bolivia is the cheap **chicken restaurants** known as *pollos spiedo*, *pollos broaster* or *pollos a la brasa*, where you can get a quarter of spit-roasted chicken with fried potatoes and other trimmings for about US$1.

Few restaurants open much before 8am for **breakfast** (*desayuno*) – Bolivians tend either to make do with a hot drink and a bread roll or, if they want something more substantial, to head to the market for soup or rice and meat. In tourist-oriented places, though, you'll find continental and American breakfasts, along with fruit juices and travellers' favourites like banana pancakes and fruit salads.

Markets

Wherever you are in Bolivia, the cheapest place to eat is invariably the **market**. Here you'll find rows of stalls selling cheap and filling soups, snacks and meals that can satisfy most appetites for less than US$1, and they're also often the best places to try out regional specialities. You'll also find rows of **juice stalls**, where you can order any combination of the delicious fruits grown in Bolivia, blended with milk or boiled water in front of your eyes and costing about US$0.25 for a glass and a half. In addition, markets open far earlier than most restaurants and cafés. From around 6am you can find stalls selling coffee and tea with bread, sandwiches and pastries, and – more popular with the locals – *api*, a hot, sweet, thick maize drink flavoured with cloves and cinnamon and served with deep-fried pancakes known as *buñuelos*.

The standard of **hygiene** in market stalls is often not the highest, however, and you should probably avoid eating at them until your stomach has adjusted to local bacteria. In general, food cooked in front of your eyes is probably safe; food that's been left sitting around for a while may not be.

Markets are also the place to go to stock up for a trek, a picnic, or if you just feel the urge to **prepare your own food**. For vegetarians, in particular, this may be a godsend, as many of the best fruits and vegetables – avocados, for instance – rarely make it onto restaurant menus outside tourist areas.

Snacks

The most popular snack throughout Bolivia is the **salteña**, a pasty filled with a spicy, juicy stew of meat or chicken with chopped vegetables, olives and hard-boiled egg. Named after the city of Salta in Argentina, *salteñas* are sold from street stalls and eaten in the mid-morning accompanied by a cold drink and a spoonful or two of chilli sauce if desired; eating them by hand without spilling the rich gravy all over your clothes is an acquired skill. The best *salteñas* are found in Sucre, where they're also sold in specialist cafés called *salteñerias*, which open only in the mid-morning and serve nothing else. *Salteñas potosinas*, made in Potosí, are less juicy (easier to eat down the mines) and are more likely to be meat-free.

Similar to *salteñas*, but deep-fried and with a higher potato content, are **tucumanas**, also named after a city (Tucumán) in Argentina. Also commonly available are **empanadas**, simpler pasties filled with meat, chicken or cheese and either baked or (particularly in the lowlands, where the humidity makes baking difficult) fried. Another snack typical of Santa Cruz is the **cuñape**, a tasty pastry made from cheese and yuca flour. Familiar international snacks are also common in Bolivia, including **hamburgers** (*hamburguesas*) and **hot dogs** (*choripan*), sold from street stalls and in cafés and restaurants.

Comida típica

In the Altiplano, **traditional Aymara cuisine** is dominated by the **potato** in all its manifold preparations, often served alongside rice as one of two or three different carbohydrates on the same plate. The Andes are the original home of the potato, and over two hundred different varieties are grown in Bolivia. As well as being boiled, baked, mashed and fried, they are also freeze-dried using ancient techniques involving repeated exposure to sunshine and frost. Known as *chuño* and *tunta*, these dehydrated potatoes have an unusual texture and a distinctive, nutty flavour that takes some getting used to. They're often boiled and served instead of (or as well as) fresh potatoes, but they're best appreciated in the many different **soups** that are a feature of Altiplano cuisine. These are thick, hearty affairs laden with potatoes, vegetables and whatever meat is to hand – one of the most typical and widely available is *chairo*, typical of La Paz. Another standard soup ingredient is **quinoa**, a native Andean grain that grows in poor soils and at high altitudes and has a distinctively nutty flavour and a remarkably high nutritional value.

The most common **meat** in the Altiplano is mutton, closely followed by llama, which is lean and tasty. Llama meat is often eaten in a dried form known as *charque* (the origin of the English word jerky). Other Altiplano mainstays include *sajta*, a spicy dish of chicken cooked with dried yellow chilli, potatoes, *tunta*, onions and parsley; and the *plato paceño,* a mixed plate of meat, cheese, potatoes, broad beans and maize which is typical of La Paz. If you like your food with a kick, all these dishes can be doused in **llajua** – a hot sauce made from tomatoes, small chilli peppers (*locotos*) and herbs – which is served as a condiment throughout the country.

The *comida típica* of the **valley regions** around Sucre, Cochabamba and Tarija shares many ingredients with the traditional cuisines of the Altiplano, but combines them with a wider range of fresh fruit and vegetables and tends to be spicier. Maize features strongly, either ground into a flour and used as the basis for thick soups known as *laguas*, or boiled on the cob and served with fresh white cheese – a classic combination known as *choclo con queso*. Meat and chicken are often cooked in spicy sauces known as *picantes*. Pork also features strongly: deliciously deep-fried as *chicharrón*, roasted as *lechón*, or made into *chorizos chuquisaceños*, the spicy sausages that are Sucre's best-known contribution to the national cuisine. A popular valley mainstay served throughout Bolivia is *pique a lo macho*, a massive plate of chopped beef and sausage fried together with potatoes, onions, tomatoes and chillies.

In the **tropical lowlands** of the Amazon and Santa Cruz, plantain and yucca (a starchy, fibrous root similar to a yam) generally take the place of potatoes alongside rice as the mainstay sources of carbohydrate. One classic staple eaten for breakfast is *masaco*: mashed plantain or yucca mixed with shredded *charque* and fried. The lowlands are cattle-ranching regions, so **beef** features strongly – the quality is good and the price relatively low. This is usually barbecued or fried as steak, or cooked on skewers in massive kebabs known as *pacumutus*. Another classic lowland dish is *locro de gallina*, a rich chicken soup that's a meal in itself. **Game** or bushmeat is also common in the lowlands:

jochi (agouti), *tatú* (armadillo), *saino* (peccary), and *venado* (venison) all frequently appear on menus, though for conservation reasons it's better not to eat them.

Drinks

Known as **refrescos**, bottled fizzy drinks can be found all over Bolivia, including international brands like Coca-Cola and a wide range of nationally produced beverages, all of them brightly coloured and sickly sweet. Bottled processed **fruit juice** from the Cochabamba region, sold under the name "Jugos del Valle", is a good alternative. Glass bottles can't usually be taken away without leaving a deposit, and though disposable cans and plastic bottles are becoming more widespread, they're also more expensive. The word *refresco* is also used to denote home-made soft drinks, usually fruit-based, served from street stalls. **Mineral water**, both sparkling (*agua mineral con gas*) and still (*sin gas*), is fairly widely available in large plastic bottles, as is less expensive purified water labelled "Naturagua" – a good thing, as it's best not to drink the tap water. Make sure the seals on all bottles are intact when you buy them.

The delicious variety of tropical fruits grown in Bolivia is available as **juices** (*jugos*) from market stalls throughout the country, and freshly squeezed orange and grapefruit juice is also sold on the streets from handcarts for about US$0.15 a glass. **Tea** (*té*) and **coffee** (*café*) are available almost everywhere, though the latter is rarely prepared to the strength favoured by most Europeans, and sometimes comes with sugar already added – a shame, as Bolivia produces some excellent coffee. **Café con leche** is a big glass of hot milk flavoured with coffee. Many Bolivians prefer herbal teas, known as **mates**. *Mate de coca* is the best known, and a good remedy for altitude sickness, but many others are usually available, including *anis* and *manzanilla* (camomile). **Hot chocolate** is usually very good, and is usually made by grating blocks of the real thing and heating it with milk.

Locally produced **alcoholic drinks** are widely available in Bolivia, and drinking is a serious pastime. When Bolivians get together to drink, the aim is generally to get drunk, and they usually pursue this end relentlessly until they run out of drink, money or consciousness. Drinking with locals can be great fun, but shouldn't be entered into lightly, as slipping away after a couple is easier said than done. Remember, too, that until you become acclimatized, high altitude magnifies both the effects of alcohol and the resulting hangover.

Beer (*cerveza*) is available in shops, restaurants and bars almost everywhere, and Bolivians consume it in large quantities, especially at fiestas. All the major cities have their own breweries, producing German lager-style beers of reasonable quality with a strength of around five percent. These are usually sold cold when refrigeration is available, but drunk with equal gusto when it's not. Most beer still comes in returnable bottles, though cans are becoming more widespread; a large 750ml bottle costs about a dollar. Paceña, produced in La Paz, is the most popular and widely available, followed by Huari, made by the same company but with a slightly saltier taste. Taquiña from Cochabamba is also good, while Potosina, from Potosí, has a stronger malt flavour; Ducal from Santa Cruz and Sureña from Sucre are less well thought of. Most breweries also produce a dark, rather sweet, stout-like beer known as **malta**. On some beer labels you'll see the word **tropicalizada** – this means it has been produced in the highlands but is more highly pressurized for consumption at lower altitudes where the air pressure is higher: if opened at altitude it will spray all over the place. **Imported beers** are available only in larger cities and cost considerably more than local ones.

Although not widely consumed, Bolivia also produces a growing variety of **wines** (*vinos*). Production is centred in the Tarija valley, home to the highest vineyards in the world, and quality is improving all the time – the best labels are Concepción, Kohlberg and Aranjuez. Costing between US$2 and US$5 a bottle, wine is sold in shops and markets in most large towns and is available in better restaurants. Imported wines from Chile and Argentina are also widely available and often cheaper, as they're frequently smuggled across the border to avoid tax and duty.

When Bolivians really want to get drunk they turn to spirits, in particular a white grape brandy called **singani,** produced in the Tarija valley. The more expensive high-grade *singanis* are very good, but most are pretty rough. It's usually drunk mixed with Sprite or Seven-Up, a fast-acting combination known as **Chufflay**. Those who can't afford *singani* (which includes most campesinos and miners) turn to virtually pure industrial **alcohol potable**, sold in large metal cans. Consumed at rural fiestas and used to make offerings to mountain spirits and other supernatural beings, this is fearsome stuff, and you drink it at your peril.

Finally, no visit to the Cochabamba is complete without a taste of **Chicha Cochabambina**, a thick, mildly alcoholic beer made of fermented maize which is available throughout the region wherever you see a white flag or bunch of flowers raised on a pole outside a house. Considered sacred by the Incas, its tart, yeasty flavour is definitely an acquired taste, and it can play havoc with the digestion.

The media

Newspapers and magazines

Newspapers in Bolivia are sold In the street and from shops and kiosks In all major towns and cities. They are divided between a number of fairly good quality papers offering news, current affairs, sport and features; and trashy offerings like *Extra*, which feature lurid tales of sex, crime and violence – or if possible all three in the same story at once. In La Paz, the main quality dailies are *La Prensa*, which has good foreign coverage, the politically conservative *El Diario*, and the less reliable *La Razón*. The main provincial cities all have their own newspapers, which have a strongly regional outlook: *Los Tiempos* in Cochabamba is particularly good. The best of the Santa Cruz papers is *El Deber*, though its regional outlook is so strong that a stranger reading it could be forgiven for thinking La Paz was a minor province of some faraway country, so little attention does it pay to events in the de facto capital. In many provincial cities and towns the daily newspapers from La Paz or Santa Cruz don't arrive until late in the evening or early the next day, though people are still generally happy to read them when they do. Most Bolivian newspapers now have their own websites, which you can access through links on the Latin American Network Information Center website (see p.67), or via ⓦwww.prensalatina.com. For serious analysis of political, social and economic developments, Bolivians turn to the weekly news magazine *Pulso*; the fortnightly *Juguete Rabioso* is also good, combining a provocative and irreverent take on Bolivian politics with good articles on literature and culture.

International newspapers and magazines are quite hard to come by, though *Time*, *Newsweek* and *The Economist* are sold in the city centres and expensive hotels in La Paz and Santa Cruz. If you want to read daily newspapers from home, you're better off doing it over the Internet.

Radio

Radio is the most democratic of Bolivia's media, and the only one that adequately reflects the country's cultural diversity, with many of the country's hundreds of different stations broadcasting in indigenous languages. For rural Bolivians, radio is the main source of news and a window on the world. The leading national news radio station is Radio Fides, which is owned by the Catholic Church and broadcast on different FM frequencies in all the major cities.

There's also no shortage of music stations, as a flick through the FM dial will quickly reveal. Other than the Internet, carrying a short-wave radio is about the best way of keeping in touch with events back home and in the rest of the world. You can pick up the BBC World Service in English in most of Bolivia (though not in La Paz, where the surrounding mountains block the signal – check Ⓦwww.bbc.co.uk/worldservice for frequencies), as well as other international broadcasters.

Television

Bolivians watch a growing amount of television, although many homes are still without a set. Two government and five private **terrestrial channels** serve up an uninspired cocktail of football, news and imported soap operas. The state-run Canal 4 is worth watching for the shameless propaganda of its evening news bulletin, which begins each night with an editorial from the minister for information and reports nothing but good news for the government.

Better hotels offer cable or satellite TV, which in La Paz and Santa Cruz should give you access to international channels like CNN and BBC World, though in smaller cities local cable networks offer a far more limited selection.

Fiestas

Bolivians welcome any excuse for a party, and the country enjoys a huge number of national, regional and local fiestas. These are taken very seriously, often involving lengthy preparation and substantial expense, while the largest feature thousands of costumed dancers, massed brass bands and plenty of food and drink – for poor Bolivians, fiestas are often the only time they can eat and drink to their hearts' content. You should definitely try to catch a fiesta at some point during your visit, as they are amongst the most vibrant and colourful spectacles Bolivia has to offer, and at the heart of the country's culture.

Most national fiestas mark famous events in Bolivia's post-conquest history and the standard festivals of the Catholic Church, but many of the latter coincide with far older indigenous celebrations related to the sun, stars and agricultural cycle. Carnival time (late Feb or early March) is marked by fiestas and celebrations throughout the country (the most famous being in Oruro), and involves indiscriminate water-fighting – don't be surprised if you're hit by a water-filled balloon at any time during February; and don't be afraid of striking back.

In addition to the major national and regional celebrations, almost every town and village has its own annual local fiesta (some have several), usually held on the day of its patron saint. These celebrations can be much more fun to visit than major events in larger towns and cities, and often stretch out over a whole week, with religious processions, masked and costumed folkloric dances, traditional music, and eating and drinking. In indigenous communities these fiestas are often important ritual events associated with religious beliefs and agricultural cycles – it's believed that if they're not celebrated with due extravagance, the Catholic saints or mountain gods (or both) may be displeased, and the fortunes of the community will suffer as a result. Fiestas also play an important role in maintaining social cohesion, and are usually financed under a system known as *prestes*, whereby wealthier members of the community (often people who have migrated to the city but maintain close links with their home village) spend large amounts of money on food, drink and musicians, gaining enhanced status and respect in return.

The occasional visitor will usually be warmly welcomed to local fiestas, but these are often fairly private affairs, and crowds of camera-wielding tourists may provoke a hostile reaction – sensitivity is the key. The dates listed below are only for established events that are already on the tourist map, or for those that take place nationwide.

Calendar of major fiestas

January 1 New Year's Day (public holiday).

January 6 Reyes Magos. The arrival of the three kings is celebrated with processions in various towns in the Beni.

January 24 Feria de Alasitas in La Paz. Large areas of the city are taken over by market stalls selling miniature items used as offerings to Ekeko, the household god of abundance (see p.97).

February 2 Fiesta de la Virgen de la Candelaria in Copacabana.

February/March Carnaval. Celebrated throughout the country in the week before Lent. The Oruro carnival (see p.186) is the most famous, but Santa Cruz and Tarija also stage massive fiestas.

March 12 Pujjlay. Thousands of indigenous revellers descend on the market town of Tarabuco, near Sucre, to celebrate a local victory over Spanish troops during the Independence War.

March/April Semana Santa (Easter) is celebrated with religious processions throughout Bolivia. Good Friday is a public holiday.

May 3 Día de la Cruz. *Tinku* ritual combats (see p.220) are staged in some communities in the northern Potosí region. The date marks the reappearance in the night sky of a constellation known as La Cruz, though celebrations often have a Christian veneer.

May/June Corpus Christi (public holiday). La Paz stages the Señor del Gran Poder (see p.76), its biggest and most colourful folkloric dance parade.

June 21–22 The winter solstice and Aymara New Year are celebrated with overnight vigils and religious ceremonies at Tiwanaku, Copacabana, Samaipata and other ancient sites throughout the country.

June 24 San Juan. Christian version of the winter solstice and Aymara New Year, marked with bonfires and fireworks.

June Santísima Trinidad. Major religious fiesta in Trinidad in honour of the Holy Trinity.

July 16 Virgen del Carmen. Processions and dances in honour of the Virgen del Carmen, the patron saint of many towns and villages across Bolivia. Public holiday in the department of La Paz.

July 31 San Ignacio de Mojos hosts the largest and most colourful folkloric fiesta in the Bolivian Amazon.

August 6 Independence Day (public holiday). Parades and parties throughout the country.

August 15 Virgen de Urkupiña. Pilgrims descend on the market town of Quillacollo, just outside Cochabamba, for the region's biggest religious fiesta.

August 24 San Bartolomé (also known as Ch'utillos). Potosí's biggest annual fiesta, a three-day celebration with pre-Christian roots, marked by folkloric dances and religious processions.

November 1–2 All Saints and Day of the Dead (public holiday). Remembrance parties are held in cemeteries throughout the highlands, with the decorated skulls of dead relatives often on display.

Outdoor activities

Dominated by the dramatic high mountain scenery of the Andes and home to some of the most pristine wilderness areas in South America, Bolivia has the potential to become one of the world's top destinations for outdoor enthusiasts. As yet, though, its enormous potential has scarcely been tapped, and organized facilities are few and far between. To the true outdoor enthusiast, however, this should simply add to the appeal.

For climbers, trekkers and mountain bikers, Bolivia's possibilities are virtually limitless, with the added advantage that you're unlikely to find yourself sharing the wilderness with more than a handful of other adventurers. The best season for all these activities is between May and September, during the southern-hemisphere winter – the most pleasant and reliable weather is between June and August. During the rainy season between December and March or April, rain turns paths and roads to mud and streams to impassable torrents, while cloud covers the high passes and blocks many of the best views.

Trekking

Whether you want to stroll for half a day or take a hardcore hike for two weeks over high passes and down into remote Amazonian valleys, Bolivia is a paradise for **trekking**. The most popular trekking region is the **Cordillera Real**, which is blessed with spectacular high Andean scenery and is easily accessible from La Paz. The mountains here are crisscrossed by paths and mule trains used by local people that make excellent trekking routes – the best of these are ancient stone-paved highways built by the Incas and earlier Andean societies. Starting near La Paz, three of Bolivia's most popular treks – the **Choro** (see p.166), **Takesi** (see p.151) and **Yunga Cruz** (see p.152) – follow these Inca trails across the Cordillera Real before plunging down into the humid tropical valleys of the Yungas. Another good base for exploring the Cordillera Real is the town of **Sorata**, north of La Paz, where many good trekking routes begin and where the locals are well organized in terms of providing guides and mules.

The shores of **Lago Titicaca** and the Isla del Sol are also excellent for hiking, combining awesome scenery with gentle gradients. People looking for more seclusion should head for the remote and beautiful **Cordillera Apolobamba**, which is traversed by one of Bolivia's finest trekking routes, the **Trans-Apolobamba Trek** (see p.162). Elsewhere, the mountains around **Sucre** offer further excellent trekking possibilities, while the **Reserva Biológica del Sama**, above Tarija, is also home to a beautiful Inca trail (see p.247).

You should always be well **equipped** when walking, even if it's just a half-day hike. Weather can change quickly in the mountains and it gets very cold at night. You'll need strong hiking boots; warm layers such as a fleece or down jacket; a waterproof top layer; hat and gloves; an adequate first-aid kit (see p.55); water bottle and water purifiers; and sunscreen, sun hat and sunglasses. For camping out you'll need a decent tent; a sleeping bag which will keep you warm in temperatures as low as at least –5°C; an insulating sleeping mat; and a cooking stove (ideally a multi-fuel stove capable of burning gasoline and kerosene – white gas is difficult to find, and gas canisters are expensive and available only in La Paz).

The easiest way to go trekking is on an **organized** trip with a local tour operator. There are dozens of these in La Paz and in several other cities. An organized trek takes all the hassle out of route-finding and means you don't need to supply your own equipment. You'll also have all your meals cooked for you and transport to and from trailheads arranged. If you pay a little more, you can also have your gear carried for you by a porter or pack animal. Trekking this way costs between US$20 and US$40 per person per day, depending on what's included and how many people are in the group.

Things are much cheaper if you have all your own equipment, organize the logistics yourself, and just hire a **guide**. In rural towns and villages you can usually find local campesinos who know all the trails and will act as a guide for a relatively small fee (on treks of more than one day you'll also need to provide them with food and possibly a tent). If you're hiring pack animals (see below) to carry some or all of your gear, then the mule handlers double up as guides anyway. As well as making sure you don't get lost, a local guide can help avoid any possible misunderstandings with the communities you pass through – it's also a good way to ensure local people see a little economic benefit from tourism, something that can only improve their attitude to outsiders.

In the highlands it's often a good idea to hire a **pack animal** to carry your gear. The most common are mules, which cost about US$6–8 a day and can carry over 100kg with relative ease. Donkeys carry about half that, while llamas carry no more than around 30kg, and also move slowly; both should be proportionally cheaper to hire. You'll also need to pay for the *arriero* who handles the animals, and who can usually double as an effective guide.

If you plan to go trekking over longer distances without a guide, you should be competent at route-finding and map-reading, carry a compass and/or Global Positioning System, and equip yourself with the relevant topographical maps, where available. Most areas are covered by 1:50,000-scale maps produced by the Bolivian military and available in La Paz (see p.111). Really, though, it's much better to trek with a guide. Getting lost in remote mountain or forested regions is easy and can be very dangerous, and rescue services are pretty much non-existent. In addition, you should always let someone in town (at your hotel, for instance) know your plans before you head off on a long walk. It's especially important **not to trek alone** – if you sprain an ankle, that could be the last anyone ever sees of you.

Climbing

With hundreds of peaks over 5000m and a dozen over 6000m, Bolivia has plenty of types of **mountain climbing**, and many new routes still to explore. As with trekking, the most popular region is the dramatic **Cordillera Real**, which is blessed with numerous high peaks, easy access from La Paz, and fairly stable weather conditions during the dry season. In addition, the volcanic peaks of the **Cordillera Occidental**, particularly Sajama (see p.183), offer some excellent climbs, while the more remote **Cordillera Apolobamba** and **Cordillera Quimsa Cruz** also offer a wealth of possibilities. Several of the higher peaks are well within the reach of climbers with only limited experience, while **Huayna Potosí** (6090m), in the Cordillera Real, is one of the few 6000m-plus peaks in South America that can be climbed by people with no mountaineering experience at all.

Though some **equipment** is available for hire in La Paz, you should really bring your own equipment from home if you're planning on doing any serious independent climbing. You should also take care to acclimatize properly and be aware of the dangers of altitude sickness (see p.54) and extreme cold. A number of agencies in La Paz (see p.114) offer guided ascents of the most popular peaks, though you should check carefully that the guide they provide is qualified and the equipment reliable – if in doubt, go with a more reputable and expensive agency. You can get good advice and find fully qualified mountaineering guides through the **Club Andino Boliviano** (☎02/2312875), in La Paz at Calle Mexico 1638, just up from Plaza Estudiante.

Mountain biking

Bolivia is home to some of the finest **mountain bike** routes in the world, and travelling by bike is one of the best ways to experience the Andes. In recent years a number of tour companies in La Paz (see p.114) have set up **downhill mountain biking** trips. These involve being driven up to a high pass, put on a bike, and then riding downhill at your own pace, accompanied by a guide and followed by a support vehicle in case you get a puncture or want to stop for any reason. As with climbing, this is not an activity where you should try to save money by going with a cheap operator – look for a company with experienced guides, well-maintained and high-quality bikes, and adequate safety equipment; Gravity Assisted Mountain Biking (see p.114) has the best reputation.

The most popular route by far is down the road from La Paz to Coroico in the Yungas (see p.167), a stunning 3500m descent which many travellers rate as one of the highlights of South America, never mind Bolivia. You don't need any previous mountain-biking experience to do this ride, which is easy to organize as a day-trip from La Paz. Beware, though, that this is a genuinely dangerous ride – at least one traveller has died biking this route. Other popular routes include Chacaltaya (see p.126) to La Paz, and down the Zongo valley into the Yungas from Chacaltaya, while hard-core mountain bikers can try their luck on the Takesi Trail (see p.151). As with trekking and climbing, though, the possibilities are pretty much endless, especially if you have your own bike.

For advice on new routes or mountain biking in general, talk to Bolivian mountain-bike pioneer and guru Alistair Matthew, of Gravity Assisted Mountain Biking – he can also help organize specialist guided tours.

Other activities

Though the many rivers that rush down from the Andes into the valleys of the Upper Amazon offer massive potential for **kayaking** and **white-water rafting**, these activities have so far scarcely been developed in Bolivia. One or two companies in La Paz, such as Explore Bolivia (see p.30), do offer rafting trips, however, and some overseas specialist agencies, such as the US-based Explore Bolivia, occasionally make rafting and kayaking expeditions. The most easily accessible and popular river is the **Río Coroico**, in the Yungas, which offers rapids from grade II to IV (and sometimes higher) and is accessible on day-trips from Coroico. The most challenging trip is down the **Río Tuichi**, which runs from the high Andes down into the rainforest of the Parque Nacional Madidi (see p.373). Organizing this two-week expedition will take time and involve considerable expense, and you'll need to hire 4WDs to access the upper reaches of the river.

Skiing is possible at Chacaltaya (see p.126), the highest developed ski slope in the world at over 5000m. The run there is poor, however, and really worth skiing only for the novelty value. With the glaciers of the tropical Andes retreating due to global warming, new slopes are unlikely to be developed.

National parks and reserves

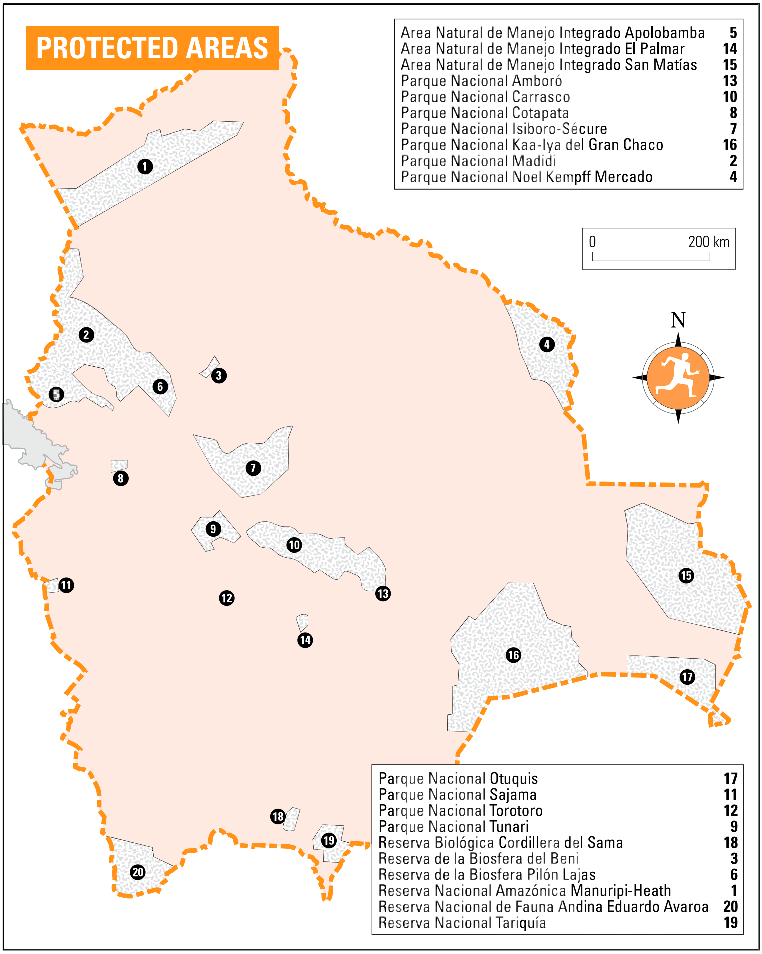
Bolivia's system of protected areas currently covers some fifteen percent of the country, comprising eleven national parks (*parques nacionales*), seven national reserves (*reservas nacionales*) and three "natural areas" (*areas naturales de manejo integrado*). These protected areas encompass the full range of different terrains and ecosystems in Bolivia, from the tropical forests of the Amazon lowlands to the frozen peaks and high-altitude deserts of the Andes. They include many of Bolivia's most outstanding scenic attractions, but their principal aim is to protect native flora and fauna, and facilities for tourism are virtually nonexistent. Though in some parks you can find primitive accommodation, in general visiting these areas involves a wilderness expedition, which is usually possible only with the help of a tour operator.

The country's national parks and reserves are administered by the **Servicio Nacional de Areas Protegidas** (SERNAP), based in La Paz (Ⓣ02/2317742, Ⓦwww.sernap.gov.bo), though this office offers little in the way of information. In cases where you need **permission** to visit a park or reserve, you can do so in the local or regional SERNAP offices. In the rare cases where you need to pay a small **admission fee**, this is also done locally. Details about permission and entrance fees for individual parks and reserves are given in the guide.

Protected areas range in size from the vast 34,411-square-kilometre Parque Nacional Kaa-Iya del Gran Chaco, the largest in South America, to the relatively small 164-square-kilometre Parque Nacional Toro Toro. There are several different categories of protected area, each enjoying slightly different legal status and degrees of protection due to Bolivia's complex and sometimes contradictory laws. **Parques nacionales** are generally large areas of unspoilt wilderness, usually incorporating particularly fragile and important ecosystems and high levels of biodiversity. **Reservas nacionales** have a lesser degree of protection, while in **areas naturales de manejo integrado**, nature conservation measures are limited by the rights of long-established local populations. The legal status of some protected areas is further complicated by the fact that they overlap with indigenous territories (*territorios indígenas*, also known as *tierras comunitarias de origen* – areas over which indigenous peoples enjoy territorial rights and a broad degree of autonomy).

Many of Bolivia's protected areas were established only recently in response to pressure and incentives from powerful international conservation groups. Some, including the Parque Nacional Madidi, were set up through **debt-for-nature swaps**, whereby international groups bought up large amounts of the country's international debt at discounted rates, then cancelled the debts in return for Bolivia agreeing to establish protected areas and invest money in their conservation. More recently, the Parque Nacional Noel Kempff Mercado has been expanded as part of a pioneer **carbon-trading** scheme, under which US energy corporations finance the protection of forest areas in Bolivia in return for being allowed to claim credits for the carbon dioxide the forests absorb from the atmosphere in meeting their own emissions targets (see p.339).

Despite such schemes, many national parks and other protected areas are under intense pressure from poor landless peasants, mostly migrants from the highlands looking for new areas of forest to clear and cultivate. Small teams of park guards with almost no resources struggle to protect thousands of square kilometres of wilderness from incursions by hunters, logging and mining companies, cattle ranchers and peasant colonizers, who are often better organized, financed and equipped. In



Area Natural de Manejo Integrado Apolobamba	5
Area Natural de Manejo Integrado El Palmar	14
Area Natural de Manejo Integrado San Matías	15
Parque Nacional Amboró	13
Parque Nacional Carrasco	10
Parque Nacional Cotapata	8
Parque Nacional Isiboro-Sécure	7
Parque Nacional Kaa-Iya del Gran Chaco	16
Parque Nacional Madidi	2
Parque Nacional Noel Kempff Mercado	4

Parque Nacional Otuquis	17
Parque Nacional Sajama	11
Parque Nacional Torotoro	12
Parque Nacional Tunari	9
Reserva Biológica Cordillera del Sama	18
Reserva de la Biosfera del Beni	3
Reserva de la Biosfera Pilón Lajas	6
Reserva Nacional Amazónica Manuripi-Heath	1
Reserva Nacional de Fauna Andina Eduardo Avaroa	20
Reserva Nacional Tariquía	19

addition, though many Bolivians are aware of the enormous value of their remaining wilderness areas and support conservation measures, there is also widespread opposition to the national parks system. Peasant federations in particular view the protected areas as a form of imperialism whereby natural resources that are rightfully theirs are handed over to international conservation groups intent, they believe, on stealing Bolivia's biodiversity and patenting any scientifically valuable species discovered.

Health

Bolivia is one of the poorest countries in the Americas, and the public health system is extremely limited. Generally speaking, the larger the city or town, the better the medical care available is likely to be. In La Paz and Santa Cruz, English-speaking doctors trained overseas are fairly easy to find. Standards decrease rapidly the further you go from the cities, and in rural areas medical facilities are poor to non-existent. If you have a choice, private hospitals and clinics are better staffed and equipped than public ones. Make sure you have adequate health insurance before you leave home, as costs can mount rapidly, and remember to obtain itemized receipts of your treatment so that you can recover your costs.

You'll find **pharmacies** (*farmacias*) in most Bolivian towns; in larger places they operate a rota system, with at least one staying open 24 hours a day. These sell a wide range of familiar drugs and medicines without prescription, so for minor ailments you can usually buy what you need over the counter. For any serious illness, you should go to a doctor or hospital; these are detailed throughout the guide in the relevant city listings. Many Bolivians are too poor to afford modern medical attention, and most make frequent recourse to traditional herbalists, known as *curanderos* – the most famous are the Kallawayas from the Cordillera Apolobamba (see p.158). In addition, the market of every town has a section selling curative plants, herbs and charms for the most common ailments.

Although Bolivia is home to some very unpleasant tropical diseases, you shouldn't get too paranoid about contracting them: most are rare and pose more of a threat to poor locals with limited access to health-care and clean water. Most serious illnesses can be avoided if you take the necessary precautions and make sure you have the right vaccinations before you go.

If you're planning a long trip it's worth consulting your doctor before you leave, as well as having a dental check-up before you go. Take an adequate supply of any prescription medicines you normally use and, if you wear glasses or contact lenses, carry a spare pair and a copy of your prescription.

It's currently recommended that visitors to Bolivia have **immunizations** for hepatitis A, typhoid and yellow fever. Advice can change, however, so check with your doctor or a travel clinic at least two months before travelling so that there's time to have any courses of injections you might need. You should also make sure your polio and tetanus vaccinations and boosters are up to date. In the case of yellow fever, make sure you get an international vaccination certificate: you may have to show this when entering an infected area or arriving in the Bolivian Amazon from Brazil or Peru, and a certificate is always required when travelling overland to Brazil from Bolivia. If you don't have the certificate, you'll have to have an inoculation there and then.

Water and food

Though the **tap water** in some cities and towns is chlorinated, in general it's best to avoid drinking it entirely whilst in Bolivia. **Bottled water**, both mineral and purified, is sold throughout the country, though rarely consumed by Bolivians themselves: check the seals on all bottles are intact, as refilling is not unknown. Soft drinks, tea and coffee are also perfectly safe to drink, and more widely available.

There are several ways of **purifying water** while travelling, whether your source is tap water or a spring or stream. Boiling water for at least ten minutes is effective, though at high altitude water boils at below 100°C, so you should let it boil for twice as long. Chemical purification with **iodine** (*yodo*) tablets or tincture (available in camping shops at home and at pharmacies in Bolivia) is easier, and generally effective, though not all microbes are eliminated and the resulting taste leaves much to be desired (although you can buy neutralizing powder that improves the taste somewhat, and a squeeze of lemon is also effective). Note that pregnant women, babies and people with thyroid complaints shouldn't use iodine. Portable **water filters** give the most complete treatment, but are fiddly, expensive and relatively heavy to carry.

Almost any kind of **food** served in any kind of restaurant can make you sick – even if the food is clean, the waiters' hands may not be – but you can reduce your chances of contracting a stomach bug by avoiding certain things. Be wary of anything bought from street stalls, and avoid salads, unpasteurized milk and cheese, undercooked or reheated fish or chicken, and anything that's been left lying around where flies can get at it.

However careful you are, the chances are that sooner or later you'll suffer a bout of **diarrhoea**, sometimes accompanied by vomiting and stomach cramps. This is usually caused by contaminated food or water, and there's not much you can do about it except drink plenty of liquid (but not alcohol or caffeine). Herbal teas like coca and camomile (*manzanilla*) can help with stomach cramps, and you should also replace salts either by taking oral rehydration salts or by mixing a teaspoon of salt and eight of sugar in a litre of purified water. "Blocking" drugs like loperimide (Imodium, Lomotil) are useful if you have to keep travelling when suffering from diarrhoea, but they only alleviate the symptoms temporarily and can actually make things worse if you have dysentery. Once you're holding down liquid, eat bland food like rice, soup and crackers, but avoid spicy, fatty and fried food, dairy products, raw fruit and alcohol until you've recovered.

You should seek medical advice if your diarrhoea contains blood; if it continues for more than five days; if it's accompanied by a high fever (over 39°C); if abdominal pain becomes constant; or if the symptoms continue for more than five days. If your diarrhoea contains blood or mucus, the cause may be either amoebic dysentery, bacterial dysentery or giardia. With a fever, it could be caused by **bacterial dysentery**, which may clear up without treatment. If it doesn't, a course of antibiotics such as ciprofloxacin, tetracycline or ampicillin (consider taking a course of one of these with you if you're going off the beaten track for a while) should do the trick, though they will reduce your natural resistance to future bouts.

Similar symptoms to bacterial dysentery persisting or recurring over a period of weeks could indicate **amoebic dysentery**, which can have serious long-term effects such as liver damage. This can be treated with a course of metronidazole (Flagyl) or tinidazole (Fasigyn), antibiotics that should not be taken with alcohol. Sudden, watery and bad-smelling diarrhoea, accompanied by rotten-egg belches and flatulence, is probably giardia, which is also treated with metronidazole or tinidazole. You should only take these drugs without consultation if there's no possibility of seeing a doctor. The only sure way to tell what is causing your diarrhoea is to have a stool test, which can be arranged by doctors in most towns.

The sun

The sun can be strong in Bolivia, and serious sunburn and sunstroke are real risks. This is particularly true at high altitudes (where the temperature is not that hot but the thin air amplifies the harm done by ultraviolet rays), or when travelling by boat on rivers or lakes (where cool breezes disguise the effects of the sun as it is reflected off the water). Exposure to the sun can also increase your chances of developing skin cancer. Long sleeves and trousers protect your skin from the sun and reduce fluid loss, and you should use a wide-brimmed hat, decent sunglasses to protect your eyes, and a high-factor sunscreen (fifteen or above) on all exposed skin. Sunblock and suntan lotion are available in pharmacies in the main cities, but they're generally expensive, so it's better to bring a supply with you from home. Sunscreen lip-balm is also worth using, particularly in the highlands. Drink plenty of liquid, particularly if you're exercising, to prevent dehydration, and consider adding extra salt to your food to compensate for the effects of excessive sweating.

Altitude sickness

Altitude sickness – known as **soroche** in Bolivia – is a serious and potentially life-threatening illness caused by reduced atmospheric pressure and correspondingly lower oxygen levels at high altitudes. It can affect anyone who normally lives at low altitude and ascends above about 2500m, and thus is a danger across much of Bolivia, including most major cities. You're most likely to be affected if you fly into La Paz from near sea level – the airport is at over 4000m, and almost everyone feels at least a touch of breathlessness. Mild symptoms can include headache, insomnia, breathlessness, nausea, dizziness, loss of appetite, tiredness, rapid heartbeat and vomiting. The best way to avoid this is to ascend slowly, if at all possible, and allow yourself time to acclimatize. Avoiding alcohol and physical exertion and drinking plenty of liquid also help. Bolivians swear by **coca tea** (*mate de coca*) as a remedy, and this is available throughout the country; the prescription-only drug acetazolamide (Diamox) can also help with acclimatization. Normal advice is to ascend no more than 300m a day once over 3000m, so far as possible.

The symptoms of **serious altitude sickness**, also known as **acute mountain sickness**, are usually experienced only over 4000m. In this condition, fluid can build up in the lungs or brain, causing high-altitude pulmonary or cerebral oedema respectively; left untreated, severely affected sufferers can lapse into unconsciousness and die within hours. Symptoms include loss of balance, confusion, intense headache, difficulty breathing and coughing up frothy, blood-stained sputum. Prompt and rapid descent is the only treatment, and you should seek immediate medical help.

Malaria and other insect-borne diseases

Malaria is fairly common in lowland regions of Bolivia, particularly the Amazon, and you should take anti-malaria tablets if you'll be going anywhere below 2500m – the altitude limit of the mosquito that spreads the disease (though it's uncommon over 1500m). Consult your doctor several weeks before you leave home to see which treatment is most suitable for you. Prophylactic treatment usually consists of chloroquine (Avloclor or Nivaquine) combined with proguanil (Paludrine); mefloquine (Lariam) is an alternative, particularly as chloroquine-resistant strains of malaria exist in Bolivia, but some nasty side effects have been reported. With both treatments, it's crucial that you keep taking the tablets for four weeks after leaving malarial areas. Malaria symptoms include fever, joint pains, loss of appetite and vomiting; if you suspect you've caught the disease, see a doctor and get a blood test.

The best way to avoid malaria, yellow fever and other diseases spread by mosquitoes is not to get bitten in the first place. Try to wear long sleeves, trousers and socks, and sleep in a screened room or under mosquito netting, preferably treated with a repellent chemical. It's also a good idea to put repellent on your skin: make sure it has at least 35 per cent DEET content. It's best to bring this with you from home, as it's hard to come by, expensive and usually of poor quality in Bolivia.

Another insect-borne danger is American trypanosomiasis, better known as **Chagas' disease**. This is spread by the bite of the *vinchuca*, also known as the assassin bug, a small flying beetle found mainly in thatched roofs and adobe walls in rural areas of the Cochabamba, Chuquisaca and Tarija departments up to elevations of about 3000m. The disease is fatal, though usually only after a number of years, and in some rural areas up to 90 percent of the human population are thought to be infected. The bite is usually painful and infection can be detected by a blood test; though the disease does respond to some drug treatments, the best defence is to try to avoid being bitten – if you do have to sleep under a thatched roof in affected regions, use a mosquito net.

Leishmaniasis is a gruesome protozoan disease spread by the bite of the sandfly, common throughout the Bolivian lowlands. The bites enlarge and ulcerate, causing large lesions that over months or years can spread to other parts of the body and eat the cartilage around the nose and mouth. Treatment involves a course of injections, available in some Bolivian hospitals; the only prevention is to avoid getting bitten. Less

A traveller's first-aid kit

The following list covers some of the items you might want to carry with you, especially if you're going trekking or travelling in remote rural and wilderness areas.

- Antiseptic cream
- Anti-fungal powder
- Insect repellent
- Sticking plasters
- Anti-blister moleskin (Compeed)
- Lint.
- Sealed bandages and surgical tape
- A course of ciprofloxacin and Fasigyn
- Imodium diarrhoea medicine
- Oral rehydration salts
- Paracetamol or aspirin
- Water-sterilization tablets or iodine tincture
- Sunscreen, lip salve, sunglasses
- Multivitamins

serious but still unpleasant is the **human botfly**, or *boro*, which lays its eggs on damp clothes or on the proboscis of a mosquito, which then transfers them to human flesh. When the eggs hatch, the larvae burrow under the skin, producing a painful lump as they grow. To remove them, cover with oil or Vaseline to cut off the air supply, then squeeze the larvae out.

Other health hazards

Bolivia is home to a wide range of **venomous snakes** (*viboras*), some of which can be lethal. Most are more concerned with getting away from you than attacking, and, even if they do strike, there's a good chance they won't inject any venom. Wearing boots, watching where you step and put your hands, and making a lot of noise when walking through vegetation all reduce the chances of getting bitten. In the event of a snakebite, keep the victim still and get medical help as quickly as possible. If possible, kill the snake for identification. **Stings and bites** from other creatures such as spiders and scorpions are uncommon but can be very painful or even fatal. It's a good idea to shake out your shoes and clothes before putting them on, and to check your bedclothes and under lavatory seats.

Rabies still exists in Bolivia and people do die from it. If you'll be spending time in remote areas or in contact with animals, it's worth having the vaccine, though all this does is buy you extra time to seek medical treatment. If you do get bitten by a dog, vampire bat or other wild animal, thoroughly clean the wound with soap and water followed by alcohol or iodine and seek urgent medical attention. The only treatment is a series of injections in the stomach, which must be administered as soon as possible; these are available in most Bolivian hospitals.

Medical resources for travellers

Australia, NZ and South Africa

Travellers' medical and Vaccination Centre Ⓦwww.tmvc.com.au, Ⓣ1300/658 844. Lists travel clinics in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.

UK and Ireland

British Airways Travel Clinics Ⓣ0845/600 2236, Ⓦwww.britishairways.com/travel/healthclinintro/public/en_gb for nearest clinic.

Hospital for Tropical Diseases Travel Clinic Ⓣ0845/155 5000 or 020/7387 4411, Ⓦwww.thehtd.org.

MASTA (Medical Advisory Service for Travellers Abroad) Ⓣ0870/606 2782, Ⓦwww.masta.org for the nearest clinic.

Travel Medicine Services Ⓣ028/9031 5220.

Tropical Medical Bureau Republic of Ireland Ⓣ1850/487 674, Ⓦwww.tmb.ie.

US and Canada

CDC Ⓣ1-877/394-8747, Ⓦwww.cdc.gov/travel. Official US government travel health site.

International Society for Travel Medicine Ⓣ1-770/736-7060, Ⓦwww.istm.org. Has a full list of travel health clinics.

Canadian Society for International Health Ⓦwww.csih.org. Extensive list of travel health centres.

Crime and personal safety

Despite being amongst the poorest countries in the region, Bolivia has long enjoyed a reputation as one of the safest destinations in South America for travellers, with far lower levels of theft and violent crime than in neighbouring Peru and Brazil. In recent years crime levels have risen, however, partly in response to the country's worsening economic situation. This is to the dismay of most ordinary Bolivians, who are shocked and outraged by stories of theft or assault, and in general the threat of crime is no greater in Bolivian cities than in North America or Europe.

The difference is that whereas back home you blend in and can spot potential danger signs much more easily, in Bolivia you stand out like a sore thumb – an extremely wealthy sore thumb, moreover, at least in the eyes of most Bolivians. There's no need to be paranoid, though: the vast majority of crime against tourists is opportunistic theft, and violence is rare. By using common sense, keeping alert and taking some simple precautions, you can greatly reduce the chances of becoming a victim and help ensure you join the vast majority of foreign visitors who visit the country without experiencing any trouble at all.

Theft

Petty theft is the most common crime that tourists face, and more often than not it's simply the result of carelessness. The first rule is, if you really don't want to lose something, don't bring it with you in the first place: wearing jewellery or expensive watches is asking for trouble. Secondly, make sure you have adequate **travel insurance** before you go (see p.61), and check what the insurance company's requirements are in the event that you need to make a claim – almost all will need a police report of any theft.

To reduce the problems of a potential theft, make a careful note of airline ticket numbers, hotline phone numbers if you need to cancel a credit card, travellers' cheque numbers (always keep the receipt separately) and insurance details; in addition, copy the important pages of your passport and travel documents and keep all these details separate from your valuables. You should also keep an emergency stash of **cash** hidden somewhere about your person. If you're staying in Bolivia for a while, consider registering with your embassy: this can save lots of time if you have to replace a lost or stolen passport.

Always carry your valuables – passport, money, traveller's cheques, credit cards, airline tickets – out of sight and under your clothing next to your skin; and keep them on you at all times. **Money belts** are good for this, but you can also get secure holders that hang under your shirt or from a loop on your belt under your trousers; a false pocket sewn inside your clothing, a leg pouch, or a belt with a secret zip for cash are even more difficult for thieves to find. It's also a good idea to keep your petty cash separate from your main stash of valuables, so your hidden money belt is not revealed every time you spend a few bolivianos. Better hotels will have a **safe** (*caja fuerte*) at reception where you can deposit your valuables if you trust the staff – this is usually safe, though it's better to leave stuff in a tamper-proof holder or a signed and sealed envelope, get an itemized receipt for what you leave, and count cash carefully before and after. Never leave cameras or other valuables lying around in your hotel room, and be cautious if sharing a room with people you don't know well, as other travellers can be thieves too. Officially, you're supposed to carry your passport with you at all times, but if asked by the police for ID it's usually sufficient to show them a photocopy of your passport and explain that the original is in your hotel.

You are at your most vulnerable, and have the most to lose, when you're on the move or arriving in a new town and have all your luggage with you. **Bus stations** are a favourite hunting ground of thieves the world over, and Bolivia is no exception: try not to arrive after dark, keep a close eye and hand on your bags at all times, and consider taking a taxi from the bus terminal to your hotel as a security precaution. Unless you travel very light, when travelling by bus or train you'll often have to put your backpack into a luggage compartment or on the roof. This is usually safe, and some bus companies will give you a baggage reclaim ticket in return, but it's still worth keeping an eye out when the vehicle stops to make sure no one carries your bag off either by mistake or on purpose. It's also worth covering your backpack with a **sack** (which you can buy in any market) to make it less conspicuous and protect it from dust, dirt and rain – though mark it so you can distinguish it from others. Some travellers like to chain their bags together or onto an immovable object when waiting around, and onto the roof of the bus or train luggage rack when travelling. You can also buy lockable lightweight metal meshes to fit over your pack for extra security – though this seems a little excessive. As well as transport terminals, markets, city centres, fiestas and other crowded public places where tourists congregate are favoured by pickpockets and thieves. If you're carrying a daypack or small pack, keep it in front of you where you can see it to avoid having it slashed; when you stop and sit down, loop a strap around your leg to make it more difficult for someone to grab.

Mugging and **violent robbery** are much less common, but do occur, usually at night, so try to avoid having to walk down empty streets in the early hours, particularly alone. ATMs are an obvious target for robbers, so don't use them at night, if possible. If the robbers are armed, it's better not to resist.

In recent years a number of travellers have been targeted for what's known as **express kidnapping.** This involves armed men, sometimes disguised as police, entering the taxi or minibus the victims are travelling in (usually with the complicity of the driver) and taking them to a secret location where they are forced to reveal their ATM credit card PIN and are held for several days while the account is drained. In two instances the kidnapped travellers were murdered, though most of the gang responsible have since been arrested. Most cases have occurred on the La Paz-Copacabana route. As such, it's best to stick to larger buses with plenty of other travellers on board when travelling on that route, and to be particularly careful when arriving after dark in the cemetery district of La Paz. Detailed information on express kidnapping in Bolivia can be found at Ⓦwww.katharinaandpeter.info.

Though usually safer than walking, **taxis** carry an element of risk. If travelling alone, don't sit in the front seat, lock passenger doors to stop people jumping in beside you, and be wary of cabs driving away with your bags – if your luggage is in the boot, wait for the driver to get out first. Radio taxis called by phone are safer than unmarked cabs, and you can always refuse to share a cab with strangers if it makes you uncomfortable.

Robbery is rare in **rural areas**, though campsites are sometimes targeted on some of the more popular trekking routes – keep all your possessions inside your tent at night, avoid camping near villages where possible, and always get local advice befre setting off.

As well as opportunistic theft, there are several **scams** used by teams of professional thieves that you should be aware of. One classic technique is distraction: your bag or clothing is mysteriously sprayed with mustard or the like, a friendly passer-by points this out and helps you clean it – while their accomplice picks your pocket or makes off with your coat or bag. Another involves something valuable – cash, a credit card – being dropped at your feet. A passer-by spots it and asks you to check your wallet to see if it is yours, or offers to share it with you. The story ends with your own money disappearing by sleight of hand, or you being accused of theft, so walk away as quickly as possible and ignore anything dropped at your feet. A third scam, usually used at bus terminals, involves thieves posing as plainclothes police officers, complete with fake documents, asking to see your money to check for counterfeit notes or something similar. Often, an accomplice (usually a taxi driver) will already have engaged you in conversation and will vouch for this being normal procedure. It isn't. If approached by people claiming to be undercover police, don't get in a car with them or show them your documents or valuables, and insist on the presence of a uniformed officer – you can call one yourself on ☎110.

The police

With any luck, most of your contact with the **police** will be at frontiers and road checkpoints. Sometimes, particularly near borders and in remote regions, you may have to register with them, so carry your passport with you at all times (though a photocopy may be enough if you're not travelling far). Generally the police rarely trouble tourists, but in any dealings with them it's important to be polite and respectful, as they can make problems for you if you're not. A smart, clean appearance is a good way of staying out of trouble; if you're scruffy or look anything like what they might call a hippy, you'll attract attention. Anyone claiming to be an undercover policeman is probably a thief or confidence trickster (see p.57); don't get in a car with them or show them your documents or valuables, and insist on the presence of a uniformed officer.

If you are the victim of theft, you'll probably need to go to the police to make a report (*denuncia*) and get a written report for insurance purposes – this is rarely a problem, though it may take some time. In La Paz you should go to the **tourist police** if you are the victim of any crime – their office (open 24hr; ☎02/2225016) is at Edificio Olimpia 1314, Plaza Tejada Sorzano, opposite the stadium in Miraflores.

Occasionally, the police may search your bags. If they do, watch carefully, and ideally get a witness to watch with you, to make sure nothing is planted or stolen – a rare but not impossible occurrence. Possession of (never mind trafficking in) **drugs** is a serious offence in Bolivia, usually leading to a long jail sentence. There are a fair number of foreigners languishing in Bolivian jails on drugs charges, and many wait a long time before they come to trial. It's not unusual to be offered an opportunity to **bribe** a policeman (or any other official, for that matter), even if you've done nothing wrong. Often they're just trying it on, and there's no need to pay. But in some circumstances it can work to the advantage of both parties. In South America bribery is an age-old custom, and paying a bribe is certainly preferable to going to jail. Finally, bear in mind that all police are armed, and may well shoot you if you run away.

Other risks

Political unrest is a constant in Bolivia, and demonstrations are a regular event in La Paz and other major cities. Though usually peaceful and interesting to watch, these sometimes turn violent, so keep your distance and make sure you can get out of the area fast if things turn nasty.

In recent years, **road blockades** have become a feature of Bolivian political life, particularly in the Altiplano, where radical Aymara peasants often block the roads between La Paz and Peru. Generally, this is an inconvenience that travellers have to put up with, and you should follow events in the media if you're worried you may get cut off. If you get caught up in the blockades, keep your head down and get out of the area, and don't try running the blockades unless you really have to. The army has killed several protesters in recent years, and tempers can run high, with blockade-breaking buses sometimes getting stoned or torched.

The election of the coca-growers leader, Evo Morales, as president in 2006 has done much to defuse the sometimes violent confrontation between the security forces and peasants in the Chapare in Cochabamba department, Bolivia's main **cocaine**-producing region. But away from the towns on the main road from Cochabamba to Santa Cruz this is still a dangerous area. Be wary of going off the beaten track in this region, as you may be mistaken for a drug trafficker or undercover drug-enforcement agent.

Culture and etiquette

Particularly in the highlands, Bolivia is quite a formal country, and old-fashioned values of politeness and courtesy are still widespread. It's normal to greet everyone you talk to with a formal good morning/afternoon/evening (buenos dias, buenas tardes/noches) before starting conversation; indeed, failure to do so can be taken as rude. In smaller towns and villages, you'll find even strangers exchange greetings as they pass on the street. *Please* (por favor) and *thank you* (gracias) are also very important. Bolivians in positions of authority expect to be treated with due respect, and can make things difficult for you if you fail to show it. Generally, it's best to call people *señor* or *señora*, especially if they are older than you, and to use a formal title such as doctor or mayor when addressing someone who has one (or affects to, as many Bolivians do).

Many Bolivians are generous, but apt to take offence if you don't accept what they have offered you, particularly when it comes to food and drink. As for **alcohol**, escaping a drinking session after just one or two is difficult to achieve – it can be better to just slip away rather than announce that you've had enough.

Race is a very sensitive issue in Bolivia, both politically and on a day-to-day basis. Indigenous people should never be referred to as *Indios* (Indians) as this is considered racist and deeply offensive. *Indigena* is much better, but most refer to themselves by their specific ethnic or linguistic group – Aymara. Quechua, etc. **Religion** – both Christian and indigenous – is also a serious matter, and you should always ask permission before intruding on ceremonies, and act with due respect and sensitivity inside churches and at fiestas or ritual events. Similarly, always ask permission before taking anyone's **photo**, as some Bolivians find this offensive, or expect to be paid.

Attitudes to what constitutes **appropriate clothing** vary sharply between the highlands and the tropical lowlands. Bolivians everywhere are used to foreigners wearing shorts, but in the conservative highlands it's not the done thing to show off too much flesh. In remote villages in particular this can cause real offence. In the hot and humid lowlands, on the other hand, it's acceptable to strip down to a bare minimum of shorts and sleeveless vest. Santa Cruz is particularly liberal in this respect.

The **sexism and machismo** characteristic of Latin America is arguably less prevalent in Bolivia than in many other countries, but it can still present an annoyance for foreign women, particularly those travelling alone or accompanied only by other women. Generally speaking, everyday sexual harassment is less of a problem in high-altitude cities like La Paz, where indigenous cultures predominate, and worse in lower, warmer cities like Santa Cruz, where Latino culture has more of a hold. Harassment usually takes the form of whistling and lewd cat-calling in the street: most Bolivian women just walk on and ignore this, and you'll probably find it easiest to do likewise. Many women find this problem increases in February and March in the run-up to Carnaval, when the usually good-natured custom of water fighting is used by some men as an excuse to harass women with water bombs. Sexual assault and rape are not common in Bolivia, but there have been a number of incidents reported by female travellers. It's best to exercise at least the same degree of caution as you would at home.

Most Bolivians do not have a very liberal attitude to **homosexuality**: though legal, it is frowned upon and kept under wraps. Though gay travellers are unlikely to suffer any direct abuse, it's best to be discreet and avoid public displays of affection. Larger cities have a handful of gay bars, but these tend to be fairly clandestine to avoid harassment.

Travel essentials

Costs

Bolivia is one of the least expensive countries in South America, and considerably cheaper than neighbouring Chile, Brazil and Argentina. Imported goods are expensive, but food, accommodation and transport are all relatively cheap, and travellers on a tight budget should be able to get around on US$15–20/£8–10/€10–15 per day, staying in basic hotels and eating set meals in local restaurants. For US$30–40/£15–20/€20–30 per day you can enjoy more comfortable hotels and good food, take taxis when necessary and go on the occasional guided tour.

The simplest double **room** with a shared bathroom usually costs about US$5, while more comfortable rooms with private bath go for US$10 and upwards a night. **Food** costs are also low. The simplest set lunches and evening meals go for about US$1 in cheaper local restaurants and markets; a more substantial set meal in a better quality restaurant might cost US$2–3, and for US$5 or so you can get a very good meal almost anywhere in the country.

Public transport is very good value given the distances involved, particularly on busy routes where several different bus companies are competing for passengers – the seven-hour bus journey between La Paz and Cochabamba, for example, costs just US$4–5. The most popular **guided tours** – into the rainforest or pampas from Rurrenabaque, or around the Salar de Uyuni and Reserva Eduardo Avaroa – cost about US$30-40 per person per day; good value when you think this includes food, basic accommodation, guide and transport over long distances.

Things are a bit more expensive in larger cities, especially Santa Cruz, and in isolated regions where goods have to be brought in over long distances. Goods and services aimed specifically at foreign tourists tend to be more expensive, and there is sometimes a tendency to slightly overcharge foreigners – if in doubt, always agree a price in advance before accepting a service. Prices in shops and restaurants tend to be fixed, but there is some room for **bargaining** in markets, when looking for a hotel room or buying a bus ticket – try asking for a reduction (*rebaja*). There's a limit to this, though. Bolivians don't generally enjoy bargaining for its own sake, and there are few sights more ridiculous than a wealthy gringo haggling vociferously for a tiny discount on an already inexpensive item being sold by a very poor market trader.

Disabled travellers

Very little provision is made in Bolivia for the disabled. Public transport, hotels and public places such as museums are seldom equipped with ramps, widened doorways or disabled toilets, and pavements, where they exist at all, are often narrow and covered with dangerous potholes and other obstructions.

Electricity

The electricity supply in most of Bolivia is 220V/50Hz; in La Paz, however, there are both 110V and 220V supplies, often in the same house, so check carefully before plugging in equipment. Plugs are two- pronged with round pins, but US-style flat-pinned plugs can also usually be used.

Entry requirements

Most visitors to Bolivia do not need a visa, although the situation does change periodically, so always check with your local embassy or consulate a few weeks before travelling. In 2007 the Bolivian government announced it was introducing a visa requirement for citizens of the United States, but at the time of writing it was not clear how thiswas being implemented. You can check the latest on the US embassy website (ⓦlapaz.usembassy.gov). Visas currently cost £18/$35 and should take several working days to process through a Bolivian embassy

Bolivian embassies and consulates

Australia Level 6, 74 Pitt St, Sydney, NSW 2000 Ⓣ02/9235 1858.

Canada Suite 416, 130 Albert St, Ottawa, Ontario KIP SG4 Ⓣ613/236-5730, Ⓕ613/236-8237.

UK 106 Eaton Square, London SW1W 9AD Ⓣ020/7235 4248 or 6235 2257, Ⓕ020/7235 1286, Ⓦwww.embassyofbolivia.co.uk

US Embassy 3014 Massachusetts Ave NW, Washington, DC 20008 Ⓣ202/483-4410 or 483-4411, Ⓕ202/328-3712; 4420 Connecticut Ave NW, Suite # 2 Washington, D.C. 20008 Ⓣ202/232-4828 or 202 232 482; Consulate Suite 702, 211 East 43rd St, New York, NY 10017 Ⓣ212/499-7401 or 687-0530, Ⓕ212/687-0532, Ⓦwww.bolivia-usa.org.

in a third country, though – as with all things Bolivian – be prepared for it to take longer.

On arrival, you'll be issued with a **tourist card** (*tarjeta de turismo*) valid for up to ninety days' stay for citizens of most EU countries, and up to thirty days for citizens of Australia, Canada and New Zealand; your passport will also be stamped. Make sure you ask for the full ninety days if you need it and are eligible, as border officials sometimes give only thirty days, particularly at remote border crossings. A thirty-day tourist card can be extended to ninety days at the **migraciones** (immigration offices) in La Paz, Santa Cruz and other major cities; this is free, but usually takes 24 hours. Border officials may ask for evidence that you have enough money to support yourself during your stay, so be prepared to show a credit card or a wad of traveller's cheques; keep cash out of sight, as officials have been known to angle for bribes. Tourist cards, as well as entry and exit stamps, are free of charge.

If you want to **stay on** in Bolivia beyond the ninety-day limit it's best to leave the country overland and return the next day, when you'll be issued with a new tourist card. If you lose your tourist card, go to a *migración* office to get a new one before you try to leave the country – this involves a lengthy bureaucratic procedure, so it's best not to lose your card in the first place. If you overstay, you'll be charged a small fine for each extra day, payable at a *migración* before you try to leave the country. If you're leaving Bolivia by a particularly remote border crossing, you may need to get an exit stamp in advance from the *migración* in the nearest major town. **Under-18s** travelling to Bolivia without their parents need written parental consent authorized by a Bolivian embassy.

Officially you must carry your **passport** with you at all times in Bolivia, but away from border areas it's enough in practice to carry a photocopy of the main page, tourist card and entry stamps to show police or other officials when necessary.

Insurance

It's essential to take out an insurance policy before travelling to cover against theft, loss, illness or injury. A **typical policy** usually provides cover for the loss of baggage, tickets and – up to a certain limit – cash or cheques, as well as cancellation or curtailment of your journey. Most of them exclude so-called **dangerous sports** unless an extra premium is paid: in Bolivia this can mean white-water rafting, trekking and mountaineering, though probably not kayaking or jeep safaris. Many policies can be chopped and changed to exclude coverage you don't need – for example, sickness and accident benefits can often be excluded or included at will. If you do take **medical coverage**, check whether benefits will be paid as treatment proceeds or only after you return home, and whether there is a 24-hour medical emergency number. When securing **baggage cover**, make sure that the per-article limit – typically under £500 – will cover your most valuable possession. If you need to make a claim, you should keep receipts for medicines and medical treatment; in the event you have anything stolen, you must obtain an official statement (*denuncia*) from the police.

Rough Guides has teamed up with Columbus Direct to offer you **travel**

insurance that can be tailored to suit your needs. Products include a low-cost **backpacker** option for long stays; a **short break** option for city getaways; a typical **holiday package** option; and others. There are also annual **multi-trip** policies for those who travel regularly. Different sports and activities (trekking, skiing, etc) can usually be covered if required.

See our website (ⓦwww.roughguides.com/insurance) for eligibility and purchasing options. Alternatively, UK residents should call ⓣ0870/033 9988; Australians should call ⓣ1300/669 999 and New Zealanders should call ⓣ0800/55 9911. All other nationalities should call ⓣ+44 870/890 2843.

The Internet

Like almost everywhere else in the world, Bolivia has seen a huge growth in Internet use in recent years and, because few Bolivians have their own computers, this has meant an explosion of **Internet cafés**, especially in places where there are large student populations. Internet cafés tend to charge about US$1 an hour, and sometimes more in remote areas where competition is thin on the ground. The speed of machines and servers usually isn't very fast, but with a little patience you'll get a connection eventually.

Some of the better-equipped Internet cafés also offer a **net phone** or Skype service, which allows you to make calls via the Internet for the same price as if you were just surfing the net – by far the cheapest way of calling home.

Laundry

In cities and larger towns you'll find laundries (*lavanderías*) where you can have your clothes machine-washed for a dollar or two per kilo; upmarket hotels can arrange this for you. Otherwise, most hotels can find someone to wash your clothes by hand if you ask. Some budget hotels have facilities for hand-washing your own clothes.

Living in Bolivia

Official requirements to gain residency in Bolivia are extremely complicated and time-consuming, so most travellers who want to stay in the country for longer periods do so informally, leaving Bolivia every ninety days to come back in on a new tourist card.

There are several options available to people looking to work or study in Bolivia. Several cities have language schools where you can study Spanish, Quechua or Aymara, and those with initiative and enthusiasm shouldn't have much trouble finding voluntary work with one of the large number of non-government organizations operating in Bolivia, though this is usually done on an informal basis. Paid work is more difficult to come by, and getting formal permission to work even more so, but opportunities do exist, particularly for those with valuable skills to offer.

Work

Unless you have arranged something in advance with an international company or non-government organization, your chances of finding paid work in Bolivia are slim. The best bet is **teaching English** in La Paz, Cochabamba or Santa Cruz, though pay is low unless you get work with the British Council or a similar international agency – this is best arranged in advance. Obviously, work as a teacher is easier to find If you have a formal TEFL qualification. Even if you do find paid employment, getting an official work permit is a costly and long-drawn-out bureaucratic nightmare – contact the *migración* in La Paz or any other major city for details.

Volunteering

Some opportunities exist for **volunteering** in Bolivia, though most require you to pay for your own food and accommodation and to stay for at least a month. This is rarely organized by formal networks or agencies – the best way to find volunteer work is by word of mouth. Asking around in main cities like La Paz, Sucre or Cochabamba, you're likely to find something worthwhile to do if you're prepared to work for free, especially if you have useful skills to offer – try contacting NGOs working locally. You'll need reasonable Spanish If you want to do any kind of volunteer work with local communities, while for research work you'll need the relevant scientific background.

One place that does take volunteers on a regular basis is the **Parque Machía Inti Wara Yassi** animal refuge in Villa Tunari in the Chapare region, east of Cochabamba (see p.289). Volunteers do everything from maintaining trails and looking after rescued animals to cleaning toilets and guiding schoolchildren. You'll need to stay for at least fifteen days. Volunteers pay a small fee for dormitory accommodation and cook and eat together.

Studying Spanish

Bolivia is a good place to **study Spanish**. Bolivian pronunciation is slow and clear, making the language easier to pick up, and tuition costs are lower than in neighbouring countries. Spending one or several weeks on an intensive course is a good way of immersing yourself in Bolivian culture and getting to know a particular city in more detail, and can provide a good reason for living in Bolivia for a while without being a tourist.

La Paz, Sucre and Cochabamba are the most popular places for studying Spanish – **language schools** are detailed in the listings section for each of these cities in the guide. You'll also find individual Spanish language teachers offering their services on a one-to-one basis in these cities and in smaller towns around Bolivia. These can be very good, though it's worth trying a lesson or two before you commit to a course with a particular teacher. More adventurous linguists can also study **Quechua** (in Cochabamba) or **Aymara** (in La Paz); even a small grasp of either opens up a whole new world, and is worth acquiring just for the gasps of astonishment and amusement you'll get from many indigenous Bolivians when they are greeted by a gringo in their own language.

Mail

Letters and postcards sent by airmail (*por avión*) to Europe and North America tend to take between one and two weeks to arrive; the rest of the world outside the Americas and Europe takes longer. Letters cost about US$1 to Europe, a little less to the US and Canada, and about US$1.20 to Australia and New Zealand. For a small extra charge, you can send letters **certified** (*certificado*), which is more reliable, but even then it's not a good idea to send anything you can't afford to lose.

Parcels up to 2kg can be airmailed from major post offices; this costs about US$15 per kilo to Europe and about half that to North America; the contents must be checked by a customs officer in a post office before being sealed. There's no point sending anything from small town post offices, as you'll almost certainly reach the nearest city or large town before your letter or package does. If you have to send anything particularly important or urgent internationally, it's worth splashing out and using one of the internationally recognized **courier services**: Federal Express and DHL have offices in major cities.

If you wish to **receive mail** in Bolivia, you can do so through the **poste restante** service available in most post offices – it's best to use those in major towns or cities. Have mail sent to "Lista de Correos, Correo Central, the town concerned, Bolivia", and make sure your surname is written in capitals and as obviously as possible, as your post will be filed under whatever the clerk thinks your surname is; if you suspect something sent to you has gone astray, ask them to check under your first name too. Mail is usually held for about three months, and you'll need your passport to collect it.

Maps

No two **maps** of Bolivia are identical, and none is absolutely correct. Most errors are made in the mapping of dirt roads and tracks: some maps mark them incorrectly as proper roads; some miss them out altogether; and many mark roads quite clearly in areas where they have never existed except in the dreams of planners.

It's worth buying a good map of Bolivia from a specialist map outlet in your home country before you go, as they can be difficult to find in Bolivia itself. That said, you can usually pick up a reasonably good national **road map**, entitled *Bolivia Highlights*, from the municipal tourist office in La Paz (see p.79), and from bookshops and tour agencies in La Paz and other major cities. The best **general map** of Bolivia is the *Travel Map of Bolivia* (1:2,200,000), produced by the

US company O'Brien Cartographics, which you should be able to find at any good map outlet in your home country. Most good map outlets also sell sectional maps of South America that cover Bolivia reasonably well.

If you're planning to do any **trekking** or **climbing** in the Cordillera Real, O'Brien Cartographics produce an excellent map of that range which you should try to get hold of before you travel. In addition, the Bolivian Instituto Geográfico Militar (IGM) produces maps at a scale of 1:50,000 and 1:250,000 that cover about three-quarters of the country. These are very useful for trekkers or anyone planning to explore more remote areas, and can be bought from the IGM office (Mon–Fri 8am–4pm) in the military headquarters (Estado Mayor) on Avenida Saavedra in the Miraflores district of La Paz. They also sell some good smaller-scale maps covering the whole country.

Money

The Bolivian currency is the peso boliviano, referred to as both the peso and the boliviano. It's usually written "B/." and is subdivided Into 100 centavos. The boliviano has been relatively stable in recent years, devaluing only gradually against the US dollar, though because of the weakness of the Bolivian economy it still remains extremely vulnerable to devaluation, and many businesses in Bolivia effectively operate in US dollars. Tour operators and many hotels quote their prices in US dollars rather than bolivianos, accepting payment in either currency. Otherwise, it's usual to pay for everything in bolivianos – indeed most places won't accept anything else.

Notes come in denominations of 200, 100, 50, 20, 10 and 5 bolivianos; coins in denominations of 1 and 2 bolivianos (these look very similar), and of 5, 10, 20 and 50 centavos. Because of the likelihood of devaluation, **prices in this book are quoted in US dollars**. At the time of writing the exchange rates were roughly:

£1 = B/.16
US$ 1 = B/.8
Euro 1 = B/.10.8

You can check current exchange rates in any Bolivian newspaper or online at Ⓦwww.xe.com/ucc/.

Credit cards, traveller's cheques and cash

The best way to carry money in Bolivia is to have your funds in several different formats – a credit card, some traveller's cheques, some cash dollars hidden away for emergencies – so that if one lets you down you can turn to another. The easiest way to access funds is using plastic. Banks in all major cities and larger towns are connected to the nationwide Enlace network of **ATMs**, from which you can withdraw cash in US dollars or bolivianos using a credit or debit card – Enlace machines accept both Visa and Mastercard. Other than in the most expensive shops and restaurants (and in some hotels and tour agencies), credit and debit cards can rarely be used to pay for services directly – where they are, Visa is the most widely accepted, followed by Mastercard; American Express cards are rarely used.

Outside cities and larger towns, debit and credit cards and **traveller's cheques** are pretty much useless, so it's important to carry plenty of **cash** with you when you head to rural areas. US dollars can be changed into bolivianos at banks and by street money-changers almost everywhere in the country, and are a good way of carrying emergency back-up funds – even if there are no official money-changers around, you can usually find someone to change dollars at a reasonable rate by asking around in shops or hotels.

Small change is in chronic short supply in Bolivia and people are often reluctant to accept larger-denomination bills, so it's best to break them at every opportunity – in big shops, hotels and bus company offices. You should also be wary of forged notes – dollars and bolivianos – particularly if changing money on the streets.

Opening hours and public holidays

Shops, businesses and public offices in Bolivia generally open Monday to Saturday from around 8.30pm or 9.30am. They mostly close for a long lunch break between about noon and 2pm (longer in some regions), and then open again until around 5.30pm to 7pm. Some offices, however, have adopted a new system, known as *hora corrida*, whereby they work straight though from 8.30am to 4pm without closing for lunch.

Banks' opening hours are generally Monday to Friday from 8.30am to noon and 2.30pm to 5pm, and on Saturdays in the morning. ENTEL **telephone offices** usually open daily from around 8am to 8pm, sometimes later. Public **museums** usually open on Sundays for at least half the day, and close instead on Mondays. All these times are approximate, though: Bolivians aren't noted for their **punctuality**, and public offices in particular often open later and close earlier than they are supposed to; conversely, private businesses, particularly those connected with tourism, often work longer hours and open on Sundays. If you're arranging to meet a Bolivian, make it somewhere you don't mind waiting around, as they're unlikely to turn up on time. Note that during **public holidays** and **local fiestas** pretty much everything closes down.

Calendar of public holidays

January 1 New Year's Day (public holiday).
February 10 Public holiday in Oruro department.
March/April Semana Santa (Easter) is celebrated with religious processions throughout Bolivia. Good Friday is a public holiday.
April 15 Public holiday in Tarija department.
May 1 Labour Day (public holiday).
May 25 Public holiday in Chuquisaca department.
May/June Corpus Christi (public holiday). La Paz stages the Señor del Gran Poder (see p.76), its biggest and most colourful folkloric dance parade.
July 16 Virgen del Carmen. Processions and dances in honour of the Virgen del Carmen, the patron saint of many towns and villages across Bolivia. Public holiday in the department of La Paz.
August 6 Independence Day (public holiday). Parades and parties throughout the country.
September 14 Public holiday in Cochabamba department.
October 1 Public holiday in Pando department.
November 1–2 All Saints and Day of the Dead (public holiday). Remembrance parties are held in cemeteries throughout the highlands.
November 10 Public holiday in Potosí department.
November 18 Public holiday in Beni department.
December 25 Christmas Day (public holiday).

Phones

Substantial funds have been invested in modernizing the Bolivian phone system in recent years, and it's now fairly efficient. The Bolivian national telephone company, **ENTEL**, has offices in all cities and most towns where you can make local, national and international calls. ENTEL offices are usually open daily from around 8am to 8pm, sometimes longer. Local calls are very cheap, and long-distance national calls are moderately priced, but international calls are relatively expensive.

There are two ways of making calls. You can either get the clerk in an ENTEL office to dial the number, take the call in a booth (where there's often a digital display of the mounting charges) and then pay at the end. Alternatively, you can use a **cardphone**, which are found both in ENTEL offices and on the streets of most towns. The cost of either method is the same. You can buy a phone card (*tarjeta telefonica*) at ENTEL offices and in shops and street stalls throughout Bolivia. They come in denominations of 10, 20 and 50 bolivianos, so the largest is good for a short international call. You'll also find a small number of **coin-operated phones** in most towns. Most departments also have their own **regional telephone cooperatives** – for example, COTEL in La Paz – that have their own networks of cardphones. These are sometimes cheaper for local calls, though no good for international or national long distance calls. Many shops and kiosks also have phones from which you can make short local calls for a small fee. All **telephone numbers** in Bolivia now have seven digits, plus a one-digit regional area code (see box 66), which you must use if dialling from a different region or internationally.

Mobile phones are widely used in large towns and cities, though coverage is poor in rural areas. If you want to use one while in Bolivia, the easiest option is to bring your own phone from home and buy a Bolivian sim card from one of the several mobile network operators, which you can then top up with pre-paid call cards.

Collect calls and charge cards

If your home phone operator has an arrangement with ENTEL, you can phone home collect using a **telephone charge card**. This enables you to make calls from most public and private phones in Bolivia by dialling an international operator. The calls are charged to your own account back home. It's worth having one of these cards, if only for emergencies. To get a card and PIN, and to find out rates, contact your domestic operator before you leave (see the box below for a list).

Photography

The light in Bolivia is very bright, particularly at high altitudes, so use fast (100 ASA) film and a UV polarizing filter. In the highlands, the best times to take photos are early in the morning and late in the afternoon, when the sunlight is not too harsh. Under the forest canopy in the lowlands, on the other hand, light is poor, so you need to use slow film. Taking photos of people without permission can offend, particularly in rural areas. It's best to ask politely ("*Puedo sacar una fotito?*" – "Can I take a little photo?"); most people react favourably to this approach, though some may refuse outright or ask for a small fee.

Time

Bolivia is four hours behind Greenwich Mean Time, an hour ahead of US Eastern Standard Time.

Tourist information

Bolivia has no national tourist offices, and though you can sometimes get limited tourist information from some of the country's embassies, you'll probably find that tour companies who run trips to Bolivia are a better bet. The Internet is another good source of information, and a growing number of websites offer everything on the country from hard facts to trivia and travellers' tales.

Most major Bolivian cities have a **regional tourism office**, either run by the city municipality or by the departmental prefecture. Most of these (La Paz, Oruro, Potosí, Sucre, Cochabamba) are fairly helpful, handing out free leaflets and doing their best to answer questions (though rarely in English). Others (notably Tarija) offer a much more limited service, though you should at least be able

Telephone codes and useful numbers

To phone abroad from Bolivia

Dial the international access code (00) + country code (see below) + area code (minus initial zero) + subscriber number

Australia	Ⓣ00 61	New Zealand	Ⓣ00 64
Canada	Ⓣ00 1	UK	Ⓣ00 44
Ireland	Ⓣ00 353	USA	Ⓣ00 1

To phone Bolivia from abroad

Dial the international access code followed by the Bolivian country code (Ⓣ591) and the relevant area code (see below), followed by the subscriber number.

Regional area codes

La Paz, Oruro and Potosí	Ⓣ2	Chuquisaca and Tarija	Ⓣ4
Beni, Pando and Santa Cruz	Ⓣ3		

Collect-call and calling-card access numbers

BT Direct (UK and Ireland)	Ⓣ0800/0044	USA Sprint	Ⓣ0800/3333
USA MCI	Ⓣ0800/2222	USA AT&T	Ⓣ0800/112
Canada Direct	Ⓣ0800/0102		

Useful numbers in Bolivia

Directory enquiries	Ⓣ118	Emergency services	Ⓣ110
Operator	Ⓣ101	Changed-number information	Ⓣ104

Useful websites

Australian Department of Foreign Affairs ⓦ www.dfat.gov.au, ⓦ www.smartraveller.gov.au.

Boliviaweb ⓦ www.boliviaweb.com. Good general Bolivian site with links to many other Bolivia-related web pages and general background information on subjects such as Bolivian art, history and food.

British Foreign and Commonwealth Office ⓦ www.fco.gov.uk. Constantly updated advice for travellers on the safety situation in Bolivia, along with some 130 other countries.

Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs ⓦ www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca.

Irish Department of Foreign Affairs ⓦ www.foreignaffairs.gov.ie.

Latin America Network Information Centre ⓦ lanic.utexas.edu/la/sa/bolivia. An excellent resource, with links to a massive range of Bolivia-related sites divided into themes including art, culture and environment.

New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs ⓦ www.mft.govt.nz.

South American Explorers Club ⓦ www.saexplorers.org. Site of the long-established non-profit organization which provides services for scientists, explorers and travellers in South America, with travel advice and warnings, online book and map sales, travellers' bulletin boards, links to other sites, and a range of membership services.

US State Department Travel Advisories ⓦ travel.state.gov/travel_warnings.html. US government website detailing the dangers of travelling in most countries of the world.

to get a plan of the city from them. Local Bolivian **tour operators** are generally a good source of information, and many are happy to answer queries, often in English, though obviously their main aim is to sell you one of their tours. Finally, the best source of information is often **word of mouth** from fellow travellers: recommendations and warnings from people who've just come from where you're heading can be like gold dust.

Guide

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La Paz and around

N
BRAZIL
PERU
6
2
1
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CHILE
PARAGUAY
ARGENTINA

CHAPTER 1

Highlights

- **Fiesta del Gran Poder** La Paz's biggest religious fiesta, during which thousands of extravagantly costumed Aymara dancers parade through the streets. **See p.76**
- **Plaza San Francisco** This lively square is the unofficial city centre for La Paz's indigenous communities, and also home to the city's most beautiful colonial church. **See p.95**
- **Calle Sagárnaga** La Paz's "gringo alley" is the best place to buy weavings and other handicrafts from all over Bolivia. **See p.96**
- **Mercado de Hechicería** This most colourful and fascinating of La Paz's innumerable street markets sells all manner of Aymara ritual paraphernalia and herbal cures. **See p.97**
- **Feria de Alasitas** In the last week of January the streets fill with colourful stalls selling miniature items which are bought and sold in a ritual commercial exchange thought to bring prosperity. **See p.97**
- **Peñas** La Paz's many folk-music venues offer the chance to enjoy traditional Andean music and dance in a reasonably authentic setting. **See p.109**
- **Tiwanaku** Just an hour away from La Paz, the ancient ruined city of Tiwanaku is one of the most monumental and intriguing archeological sites in South America. **See p.118**
- **Chacaltaya** The world's highest ski resort offers spectacular views over the Cordillera Real. **See p.126**

▲ Dancers, Gran Poder

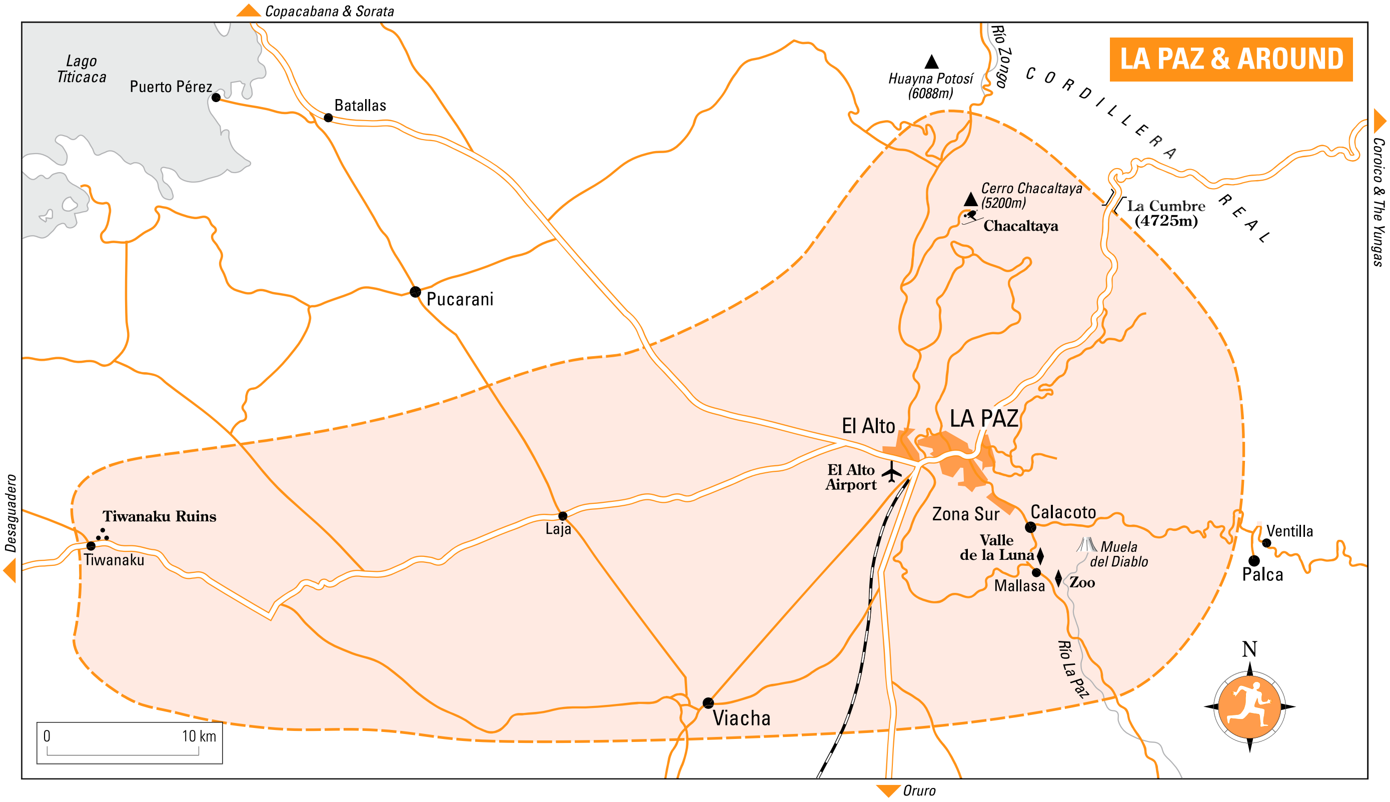
1

La Paz and around

Few cities in the world have a setting as spectacular as **LA PAZ**. Situated over 3500m above sea level, the city cowers in a narrow canyon gouged from the high Altiplano, the cluster of church spires and office blocks at its centre dwarfed by the magnificent icebound peak of Mount Illimani, which rises imperiously to the southeast. On either side, the steep slopes of the valley are covered by the ramshackle homes of the city's poorer inhabitants, which cling precariously to even the harshest gradients.

With a population of just over a million, La Paz is the political and commercial hub of Bolivia and the capital in all but name (technically, that honour belongs to Sucre). But it manages to retain the feel of a provincial city, protected from the tides of globalization by its isolation and unique cultural make-up. Founded as a centre of Spanish power in the Andes, La Paz has always had a dual identity, with two very distinct societies, the indigenous and the European, coexisting in the same geographical space. Hi-tech international banks and government offices rub shoulders with vibrant street markets selling all manner of ritual paraphernalia for appeasing the spirits and mountain gods that still play a central role in the lives of the indigenous Aymara who make up the majority of the city's population, and that of the Altiplano in general. For them, life in the city they still refer to by the old indigenous name of Chuquiago Marka is conducted largely on the streets, and at times the whole place can feel like one massive, sprawling market. The exigencies of the high altitude make the pace of life quite slow, but there's an underlying bustle: everyone seems to be in a hurry, even though no one moves very fast. The warmth and vitality of La Paz is never more evident than during the **Fiesta del Gran Poder**, held in late May or early June, when young and old alike take to the streets in bizarre masks and outlandish costumes to dance in riotous celebration of the sacred and the profane.

While horrendous congestion, tiny sidewalks and attendant pollution problems make life challenging for pedestrians in much of the city (and present an almost constant challenge just to stay on your feet and in one piece), and authorities have been forced to limit vehicular access on alternate days according to number plate (if you're driving – rental cars included – check out municipal portal Ⓦ www.ci-lapaz.gov.bo to find out if your number's up, so to speak), most visitors find La Paz's compelling street life and tremendous cultural vitality warrant spending at least a few days here. The city also makes an excellent base for trekking in the surrounding mountains and exploring the rest of the country. Lago Titicaca and the tropical valleys of the Yungas are within easy reach, and La Paz is also a good jumping-off point for trips to the southern Altiplano or down into the forests of the upper Amazon. Closer to hand are several good day-trips. To the west of the city the monumental ruins of


LA PAZ & AROUND
Copacabana & Sorata
Coroico & The Yungas
Desaguadero
Oruro
Lago Titicaca
Puerto Pérez
Batallas
Pucarani
Huayna Potosí (6088m)
Río Zongo
CORDILLERA REAL
Cerro Chacaltaya (5200m)
Chacaltaya
La Cumbre (4725m)
El Alto
LA PAZ
El Alto Airport
Zona Sur
Calacoto
Valle de la Luna
Muela del Diablo
Mallasa
Zoo
Ventilla
Palca
Río La Paz
Tiwanaku Ruins
Tiwanaku
Laja
Viacha
N
0
10 km

Tiwanaku provide a reminder that great civilizations rose and fell in this region long before the arrival of the Spanish, and the dramatic mountain scenery that surrounds La Paz can be easily reached on excursions down the valley to the south or up to **Chacaltaya**, the highest ski resort in the world.

Some history

La Ciudad de Nuestra Señora de la Paz – the City of Our Lady of Peace – was founded in 1548 on the orders of Pedro de la Gasca, the supreme representative of the Spanish Emperor in Peru, to commemorate the end of almost ten years of bitter civil war between rival Spanish factions fighting over the combined territories of Alto and Bajo Peru. Gasca ordered Captain **Alonso de Mendoza** to establish a new city midway between Cuzco and the recently discovered mineral wealth of Potosí, and on October 20, 1548, the new city's foundation ceremony was held outside the church at Laja, high on the Altiplano. Three days later the streets of the new settlement were traced out in the Choqueyapu valley, a short distance to the east. The site offered several advantages: the valley gave protection from the cold winds of the Altiplano and offered ample supplies of wood, water and indigenous labour from nearby settlements. It also had good agricultural lands nearby, and easy access to the products of several different ecological zones: meat and potatoes from the Altiplano; fish from Lago Titicaca; fruit, coca and other tropical crops from the valleys of the Yungas. Though some gold was found in the valley, this was quickly exhausted, and commerce rather than mining became the basis of the new city's economy.

The merchants of La Paz grew rich through the trade in coca from the Yungas to the mines of Potosí, and the city also prospered as a waystation on the route between the mines and the coast and between Lima and Buenos Aires, the two great centres of colonial rule in South America. The city also became an important centre for the spiritual conquest of the densely populated surrounding region, and before the end of the sixteenth century the Dominican, Jesuit and Franciscan orders had all established bases from which missionaries were sent out to convert the indigenous population. By 1665 some five hundred Spaniards were living in La Paz, while a much larger indigenous population was housed in the three parishes that sprang up on the other side of the Río Choqueyapu, clearly separated from the Spanish city. When the king of Spain sought new officials to govern La Paz the appointment was evidently considered attractive: amongst the unsuccessful candidates was the writer **Miguel de Cervantes** – quite how the celebrated story of Don Quixote would have turned out had Cervantes come to live in La Paz is difficult to imagine.

La Paz's importance as a centre of colonial power made it an obvious target during the great rebellion that swept the Andes in 1780–81. In 1781 an Aymaran army led by **Tupac Katari** twice laid siege to the city. The first siege lasted 109 days, during which perhaps a third of the Spanish defenders, led by **Sebastián de Segurola**, died of hunger or in bitter fighting before an army sent from Chuquisaca (Sucre) drove the rebels away. The relieving army was then drawn away to Oruro, however, and the siege resumed. This time the rebels employed a tactic they had used successfully against the town of Sorata, building a dyke to block the waters of the Río Choqueyapu above La Paz with the intention of releasing an apocalyptic flood to destroy the city. Fortunately for the desperate defenders, the dyke broke before sufficient waters had built up, and though the resulting torrent swept bridges and houses away, the city survived and held out until it was relieved by the army sent from Buenos Aires that finally crushed the rebellion.

The relative tranquillity that followed lasted only until 1809, when the leading citizens of La Paz – many of whom had fought against the uprising in 1781 – joined the revolutionary movement that was beginning to sweep the continent by making the first full declaration of independence from Spain. This initial revolt was quickly crushed, however, and La Paz suffered greatly during fourteen long years of civil war that followed, changing hands frequently as the fortunes of the royalist and pro-independence armies rose and fell. Its criollo citizens (i.e., those born of "pure" Spanish blood, either through peninsular-born parents or through a combination of and criollo parents) were generally supportive of the independence cause, but were deeply suspicious of the indigenous guerrilla armies that twice besieged the city.

By the time Bolivia's independence was finally secured in 1825, La Paz was the biggest city in the country, with a population of some 40,000. Though Sucre remained the **capital**, La Paz was increasingly the focus of the new republic's turbulent political life – a mixed blessing in a country where changes of government were frequent and often accompanied by bloodshed. In 1899 the growing rivalry between the two cities was resolved in a short but bloody

La Fiesta del Gran Poder

The defining cultural and social event of the year in La Paz is undoubtedly **La Fiesta del Gran Poder**, a dramatic religious fiesta held during late May or early June in homage to a miraculous image of Christ known as **Nuestro Señor del Gran Poder** (Our Lord of Great Power). The origins of the Gran Poder are surprisingly recent. It started little over half a century ago as a local celebration amongst Aymara migrants living and working in the market district around Avenida Buenos Aires, but since the beginning of the 1980s it has grown into an enormous festival that has taken over the centre of the city and is enjoyed by Paceños of all different classes. In part, this expansion has followed the growing wealth and influence of the Aymara merchants, but it also reflects a growing acceptance of Aymara culture and folklore amongst the city's white and mestizo residents.

Tens of thousands of costumed dancers belonging to over a hundred different folkloric fraternities take part in the **entrada** – the procession that marks the start of the fiesta – parading through the centre of La Paz to the cacophonous accompaniment of massed brass bands. The various dances performed during the *entrada* represent different themes from Aymara folklore and Catholic traditions from all over the department of La Paz and further afield. The sight of grown adults dressed in outrageous costumes drinking and dancing their way through the city may seem an odd form of religious devotion, but the participants and spectators see no contradiction in combining the sincere expression of religious belief with a riotous party – indeed the act of dancing nonstop for several hours at high altitude in a heavy costume can be seen as an exhausting form of devotional sacrifice, while the Señor del Gran Poder would doubtless be disappointed if the celebration of his fiesta were not accompanied by sufficient revelry.

The **cost** of the fiesta is enormous. Many dancers have to save for months to pay for the ever more elaborate costumes and masks – which are expected to change each year and can cost hundreds of dollars – and the dance troupes and their relatives must be provided with food, drink and musical accompaniment for about a week of nonstop revelry. These expenses are usually covered by sponsorship from wealthy individuals, whose prestige is thereby enhanced, and the different fraternities vie fiercely with each other for the title of best dance group, a competition that has led to ever more extravagant expenditure by fraternity sponsors.

civil war that left La Paz as the seat of government, home to the president and the congress, and the capital in all but name.

The first half of the twentieth century saw La Paz's population grow to over 300,000. In 1952 La Paz was the scene of the fierce street fighting which ushered in the **revolution** led by the MNR (*Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario*) (see p.403). The sweeping changes that followed further fuelled the city's growth as the Aymara population of the Altiplano, released from servitude by the Agrarian reform (see p.404), migrated en masse to the metropolis. This migration from the countryside profoundly changed the character of La Paz, quadrupling its population to over a million and transforming it into a predominantly Aymara city. Certainly much of La Paz's European-descended elite has seen it in those terms, for as the poor indigenous neighbourhoods have crept up the steep slopes around the city and onto the Altiplano above (where the chaotic satellite settlement of **El Alto** is now recognized as a separate city), so the wealthier residents have retreated to the new residential suburbs of the Zona Sur, maintaining to some extent the city's old duality.

While this ethnic and geographical gulf is hardly without precedent in Latin America, age-old tensions reached a boiling point over the first half of the decade, with violent civil disturbances toppling a series of neo-liberal presidents. Plans to export natural gas via a Chilean pipeline prompted the first "gas war" in 2003, when widespread roadblocks and protests left at least 60 people dead, forcing then-president Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozado (or Goni as he was popularly – or rather unpopularly – known) to flee to the USA. While Bolivia is currently attempting to extradite Goni and his cabinet on genocide charges, the Bush administration has countered that the case is politically motivated. Further unrest over the unresolved gas issue erupted in May and June 2005 with hundreds of thousands of indigenous protestors massing in La Paz, effectively cutting off the city and effecting the resignation of then-president Carlos Mesa.

Things have calmed down since the 2005 election of Evo Morales, yet recent dynamite-throwing demonstrations by discontented miners underline the fact that La Paz, in its strategic relation to El Alto and the Highland Ayamara communities, remains a crucible for popular protest.

Arrival, information and city transport

Arriving in La Paz by **bus** or **plane** is a relatively painless experience: traffic problems notwithstanding, the city's small size makes it fairly easy to find your way around and there are inexpensive taxis and still cheaper public transport, though the latter isn't always easy to travel in with big bags.

Even if the high altitude doesn't take your breath away, your first sight of the city probably will. Unless you're arriving by bus from the Yungas to the north, you'll come in through the El Alto, high on the Altiplano above La Paz, with panoramic views of the city nestled in the deep valley below and the magnificent peak of Illimani rising behind in the distance.

By air

International and domestic flights arrive at **El Alto airport** (flight information on ☎02/2810122) on the rim of the Altiplano about 10km away from – and almost 500m above – La Paz. At over 4000m above sea level, this is the highest international airport in the world, and it can feel as if planes have to climb rather than descend when they come in to land. Despite being an international airport serving Bolivia's de facto capital, the terminal has a very provincial feel. Its rather limited facilities include an **airport information desk** (closed daily 1.30–3.30am), a couple of **banks** where you can change US dollars and traveller's cheques (though not at the best rates), and an **ATM** where you can make cash withdrawals on Visa or MasterCard. There's also a café and restaurant, plus Entel/Internet facilities and a few newsstands and souvenir shops.

The easiest way into town from here is by **taxi**, a half-hour ride that should cost about $7. Alternatively, an airport **shuttle minibus** (micro) runs down into the city along the length of the Prado to Plaza Isabella La Católica ($0.50 per person; Mon–Sat every 10–20min between about 6am–8pm, every 30min on Sun). If you're heading out to the airport, wait on the Prado and flag down any minibus marked "aeropuerto".

Internal flights with the military airline TAM arrive at the **military airport** (Ⓣ02/2841884), alongside the commercial airport on Avenida Juan Pablo II in El Alto. Taxis wait here for passengers, but the shuttle bus does not; to get down to La Paz by public transport you'll need to catch any micro heading west along Avenida Juan Pablo II to La Ceja, the district on the edge of the Altiplano above La Paz, and change there.

By bus

Buses from southern and eastern Bolivia and international buses arrive at the **Terminal Terrestre** on Plaza Antofagasta, about 1km northeast of Plaza San Francisco. From here, it's a short taxi ride or a twenty-minute walk down Avenida Montes to the main accommodation areas in the city centre. The terminal has snack bars, luggage storage, a post office, telephones and a bus **information office** (daily 7am–11pm; Ⓣ02/2285858 or 2286061), which has timetable information for many different bus companies. Departing passengers have to pay $0.25 to use the terminal – tickets are sold from an office at the back of the station near the toilets.

Buses from Copacabana, Tiwanaku, Sorata and Charazani arrive in the **cemetery district** (marked *Cementario*) high up on the west side of the city. Plenty of micros head down to the city centre from here, but it's a pretty chaotic part of town, so it's a good idea to take a taxi ($1.20), especially if you have heavy luggage.

Altitude sickness

The main problem you're likely to face when you arrive in La Paz is the **altitude**: the city stands at over 3500m above sea level, and the airport in El Alto is even higher, at over 4000m. If you're flying in or arriving by bus from lower elevations you may suffer from **altitude sickness**, also known as **soroche**, a debilitating and potentially dangerous condition caused by the reduced oxygen levels found at high elevations. Mild symptoms can include breathlessness and lethargy, sleeplessness, headaches and nausea, though for most people these fade within a few days as the body adjusts to the rarefied air. On arrival at high altitude you should take things very slowly and get straight to a hotel where you can leave your luggage and rest. It's also best to avoid smoking and alcohol and to drink plenty of liquids, particularly **maté de coca**, an infusion of coca leaves which any local will tell you is the ideal remedy.

In its more serious forms, altitude sickness can be dangerous or even **life-threatening**. If you think you may have the symptoms of high-altitude pulmonary or cerebral oedema (see p.54 for more details) you should seek immediate medical advice. The best place for this is the High Altitude Pathology Clinic, Clinica IPPA, Av Saavedra 2302 Ⓣ02/2245394, Ⓦwww.geocities.com/zubietaippa.

Buses from Coroico and Chulumani in the Yungas, and from Rurrenabaque and the Beni, arrive in the **Villa Fátima** district, in the far northeast of the city. The different bus companies all have offices around the intersection of Avenida de la Americas and Calle Yanacachi. Again, plenty of micros head down to the city centre from here, but a taxi ($1.20) is quicker, easier and more secure.

For details of **moving on from La Paz**, see p.113.

Orientation

La Paz's geography makes it a difficult place to get lost in: if you do become disoriented, just head downhill and you'll eventually hit the city's main thoroughfare, the broad avenue known locally as the **Prado**. Running southeast along the course of the Río Choqueyapu, which is now entombed in concrete, the Prado neatly divides the city in two. At its top end is the **Plaza San Francisco**, the focal point of the **indigenous neighbourhoods** which climb the slopes of the valley to the west. This is the liveliest district of the city, an endless warren of markets that is also where much of the budget accommodation and other tourist services are found, centred above all on **Calle Sagárnaga**.

To the east of the Prado is the **colonial city centre**, still the main commercial district and home to most of the city's museums and surviving colonial churches. Heading southeast, the Prado's official name changes from Avenida Mariscal Santa Cruz to Avenida 16 de Julio as it passes the suburbs of **San Pedro** to the west and **Miraflores** to the east. The Prado ends on **Plaza del Estudiante**, south of which is the pleasant middle-class suburb of **Sopocachi**.

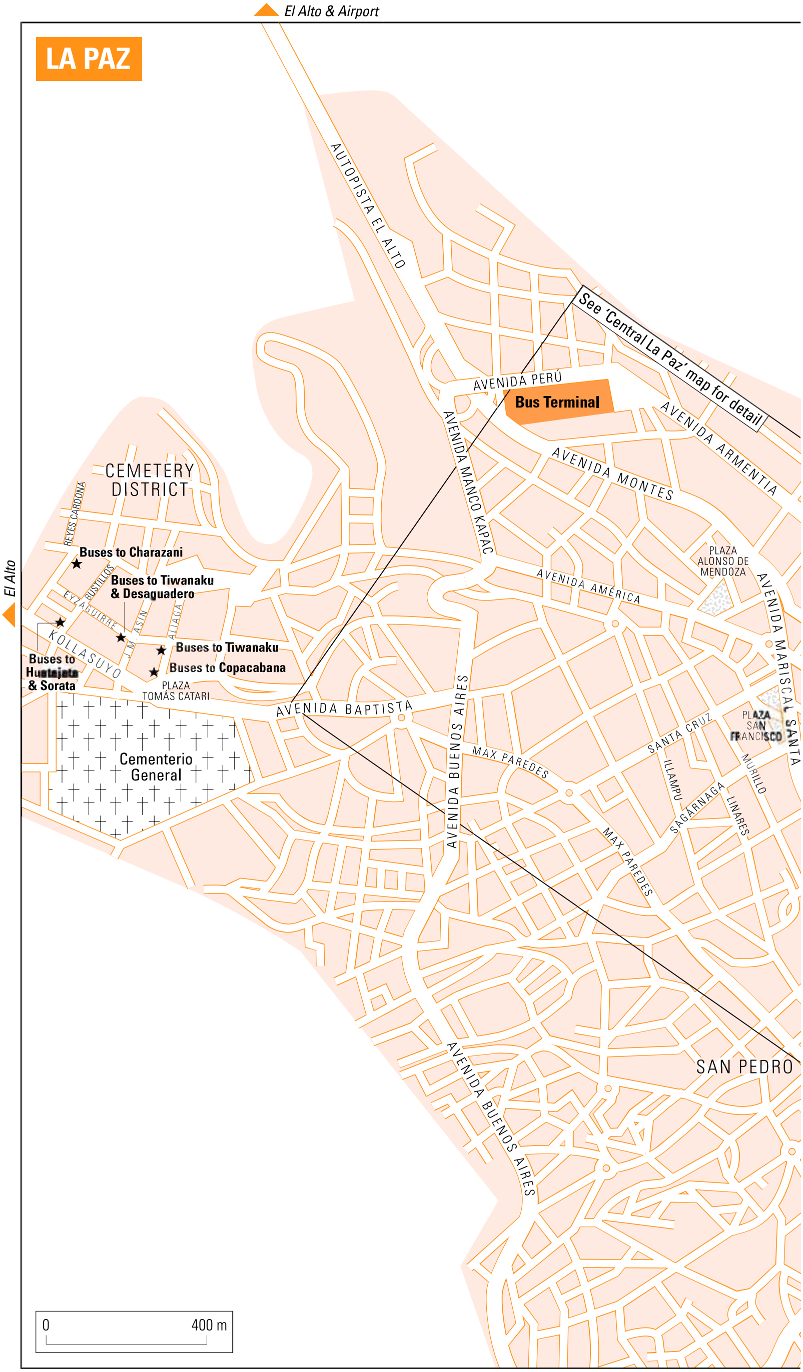
Unlike most cities, in La Paz the richest neighbourhoods occupy the lowest altitudes, while the homes and markets of the poor are located high up on the steep slopes of the canyon. Many of the city's wealthiest residents now live in the upmarket suburbs that have sprung up down the valley in the **Zona Sur**, about 5km from the city centre, while recent Aymara rural migrants tend to live in the sprawling satellite city of **El Alto** on the rim of the Altiplano above La Paz.

Information

There's a small **tourist information office** (Mon–Fri 8.30am–noon & 2.30–7pm, Sat & Sun 9.30am–1pm; ☎02/2371044) on Plaza Estudiante at the end of the Prado which has plenty of information on La Paz and the surrounding area, but not much on destinations further afield. The staff is very friendly and helpful and there's usually someone who speaks a little English, plus they offer a free map of the city and have flyers for most of the main **tour agencies**. These agencies – particularly concentrated on and around **Calle Sagárnaga**, off Plaza San Francisco – are the best places to go for information on the rest of the country, though obviously their main aim is to sell you a tour. There's also a reasonably helpful privately run **tourist information kiosk** (Mon–Fri 10am–1.30pm and 3.30–7pm) on the ground floor of the *Café Angelo Colonial* at Linares 922, just off Sagárnaga. They can tell you about trekking and other organized tours around La Paz, but don't seem to push any particular agency.

City transport

You'll probably spend most of your time in the city centre, which is compact and easily **walkable** – it takes less than half an hour to get from one end of the Prado to the other on foot, and the traffic is so congested that walking is often the quickest way to get around, though at this altitude the steeper streets can be


El Alto & Airport
LA PAZ
AUTOPISTA EL ALTO
See 'Central La Paz' map for detail
AVENIDA PERÚ
Bus Terminal
AVENIDA ARMENTIA
AVENIDA MANCO KAPAC
AVENIDA MONTES
CEMETERY DISTRICT
REYES CARDONA
Buses to Charazani
BUSTILLOS
Buses to Tiwanaku & Desaguadero
EYZAGUIRRE
ASIN
ALIAGA
El Alto
KOLLASUYO
J.M.
Buses to Tiwanaku
Buses to Huatajata & Sorata
Buses to Copacabana
PLAZA TOMÁS CATARI
AVENIDA AMÉRICA
PLAZA ALONSO DE MENDOZA
AVENIDA MARISCAL SANTA
AVENIDA BAPTISTA
AVENIDA BUENOS AIRES
Cementerio General
MAX PAREDES
SANTA CRUZ
PLAZA SAN FRANCISCO
ILLAMPU
SAGÁRNAGA
MURILLO
LINARES
MAX PAREDES
SAN PEDRO
AVENIDA BUENOS AIRES
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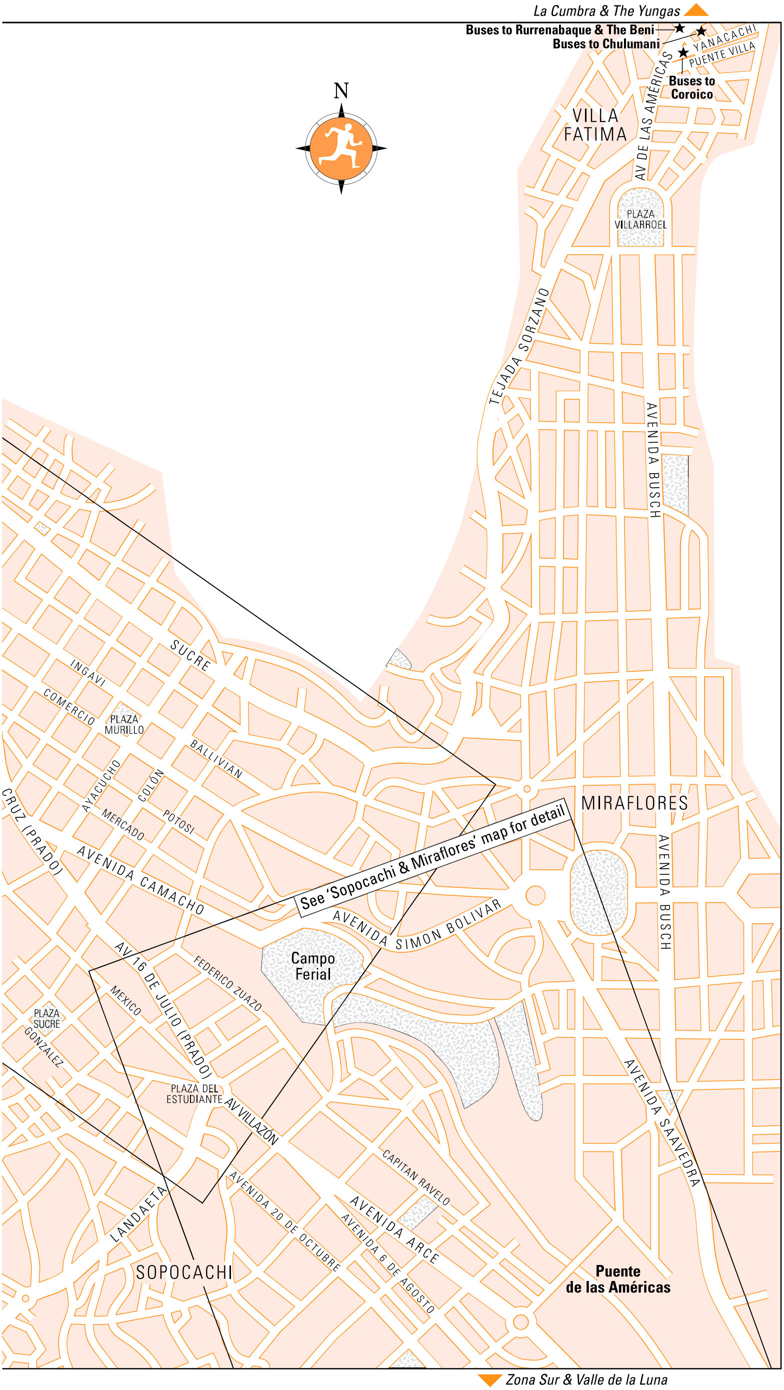

La Cumbra & The Yungas
Buses to Rurrenabaque & The Beni
Buses to Chulumani
YANACACHI
PUENTE VILLA
Buses to Coroico
AV DE LAS AMÉRICAS
VILLA FATIMA
N
PLAZA VILLARROEL
TEJADA SORZANO
AVENIDA BUSCH
SUCRE
INGAVI
COMERCIO
PLAZA MURILLO
BALLIVIAN
AYACUCHO
COLÓN
POTOSI
MERCADO
CRUZ (PRADO)
AVENIDA CAMACHO
MIRAFLORES
See 'Sopocachi & Miraflores' map for detail
AVENIDA SIMON BOLIVAR
Campo Ferial
AV 16 DE JULIO (PRADO)
FEDERICO ZUAZO
MEXICO
PLAZA SUCRE
GONZALEZ
PLAZA DEL ESTUDIANTE
AV VILLAZÓN
AVENIDA SAAVEDRA
CAPITAN RAVELO
AVENIDA 20 DE OCTUBRE
AVENIDA ARCE
AVENIDA 6 DE AGOSTO
LANDAETA
SOPOCACHI
Puente de las Américas
Zona Sur & Valle de la Luna

Warning

Travellers arriving at the main bus terminal are occasionally targeted by thieves posing as plain-clothes police officers, complete with fake documents. One popular scam involves them asking to inspect your money for counterfeit notes or your bags for drugs, then robbing you (they often work in tandem with someone pretending to be a tourist, who will befriend you before they approach and vouch for the legitimacy of their request). If approached by people claiming to be undercover police don't get in a car with them or show them your documents or valuables, and insist on the presence of an olive-green uniformed officer – you can call one yourself on ☎110. Scams of all kinds increasingly involve taxi drivers, so on arrival it's better not to share a taxi with strangers. Worse still, increasing numbers of travellers and even ordinary Paceños are being assaulted and sometimes killed by rogue taxi and micro drivers; see the respective sections below and opposite for advice on travelling safely by taxi or micro.

pretty exhausting to climb. That said, **taxis** are plentiful and relatively good value, and the city's **public transport** network, though slow and hopelessly chaotic, is very cheap.

Taxis

Anyone with a car can work as a taxi driver just by putting a sign in their windscreen, and many Paceños do so part time to supplement their incomes – it's not unusual to find a university professor at the wheel of a cab. These **unlicensed taxis** charge about $0.70 per passenger for journeys anywhere in the centre of town – there are no meters and some drivers have a tendency to overcharge foreigners, so it's best to agree the fare at the beginning of the journey, and don't be suckered into paying more than a dollar. If the cab isn't full it's not unusual for them to pick up other passengers who are heading in the same direction, though under current conditions it's best to insist that you travel alone. Unfortunately, recent years have witnessed a spate of often vicious assaults, abductions and even murders by bogus taxi drivers on passengers, especially gringos, and especially at night. To reduce your chances of being a victim, it's advisable to take a **Radio taxi**: try Alfa (☎02/2412525) or Ideal (☎02/2222425). They're marked as such, usually with a telephone number painted on the side. When you enter the cab, the driver is obliged by law to call their office and inform them of your destination; drivers also often – but not always – have photo I.D. on display. They charge a flat rate of about $1.25 for anywhere in the city centre regardless of the number of passengers, which makes them good value for more than one person. Bear in mind that Radio taxis are obliged to provide an exclusive service, and are not allowed to pick up other passengers en route; protest vehemently if they try to do so. In both kinds of taxi, fares increase for longer journeys, especially if they involve a steep climb which consumes more fuel; a taxi to the Zona Sur should cost about $1.50. It's also a good idea to come equipped with a pocketful of small change as drivers rarely have any. For trips outside the city, Trans Diplomático (☎02/2224343) offers a 24-hour **long-distance taxi** service; you can usually pick one up outside the *Radisson* hotel on Avenida Arce.

Buses, micros and trufis

There are two main forms of public transport in La Paz: **city buses**, ageing leviathans that belch choking fumes as they trundle slowly around the city, and privately owned minibuses, known as **micros** (many of which also belch out choking fumes), which run along all the city's main thoroughfares and are one of the main causes of the city's ever worsening traffic congestion, as well as the daily gridlock in El Alto. Though quicker and much more numerous than the big buses (and relatively safer than unlicensed taxis), micros can be incredibly cramped and are slowed by the need to stop at every street corner to pick up passengers.

Getting the hang of the city's bus and micro **routes** can be difficult. Most main routes are served by a variety of different drivers' syndicates, each with a different route number, which can be very confusing. The trick is to look for the names of the micro's destinations, which are written on signs inside the windscreen and bellowed incessantly by the driver's assistants, who hang from the open doors in the hope of coaxing just one more passenger into the already packed vehicle. The micros you'll most likely want to use are those which run **up and down the Prado** between the bus terminal and Plaza San Francisco in the north and Avenida 6 de Agosto in Sopocachi to the south. To go anywhere else in the city, it's usually enough to wait by any major intersection until you hear the name of your destination shouted out; alternatively, ask a driver's assistant where to catch the relevant micro.

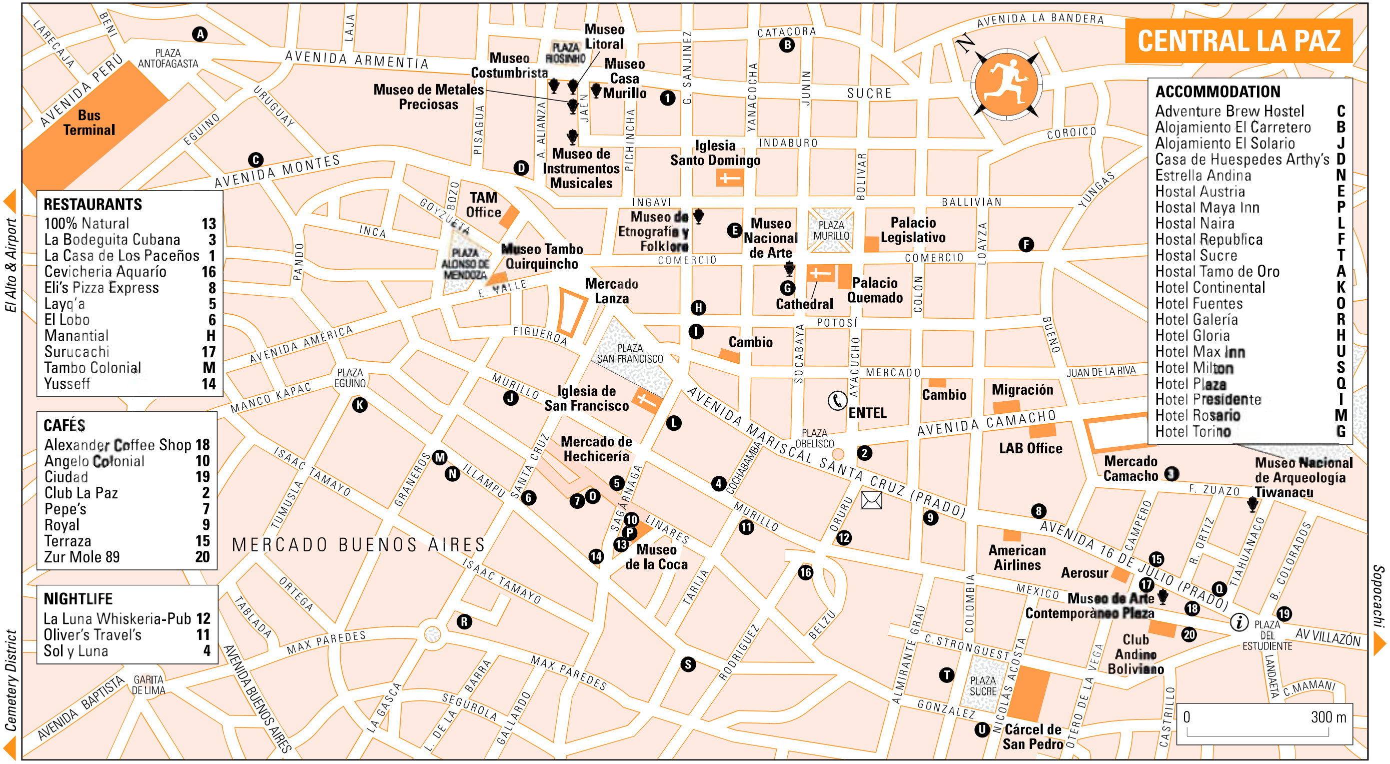
The city's third main form of transport is **trufis** – large estate cars which are used as collective taxis and follow fixed routes, mostly between Plaza del Estudiante and the wealthy suburbs of the Zona Sur ($0.40). They're designated by route numbers and, like micros, have their principal destinations written on a sign inside the windscreen.

Trufis and micros charge a flat **fare** of about $0.12 in the city centre; city buses cost slightly less. All charge extra if your luggage fills a space that might otherwise be occupied by another passenger. The safety warning about taxis also goes for micros and trufis, and you should always be on your guard; the police advise taking down the licence plate number and colour of any vehicle you travel in, and go so far as to warn against accepting any food or drink from your fellow travellers in case it contains sedatives.

Accommodation

There's plenty of accommodation in La Paz to suit most budgets, though things get pretty busy in the peak tourist season from June to August, and prices tend to increase accordingly. Most places to stay are in the **city centre** within a few blocks of **Plaza San Francisco**, close to or in the midst of the colourful market district and within walking distance of most of the city's main attractions. This area is also where most tourist services are concentrated, so it's convenient for booking tours, changing money and sorting out other practicalities. The other option is to stay in one of the more upmarket places down the **Prado**, towards the middle-class suburb of **Sopocachi**, south of the city centre, which is where most of the city's better restaurants and many of the nightspots are located. If your budget can handle it, there's also the option of staying down in the Zona Sur, a warmer, cleaner and more oxygenated option, with the added bonus of some very fine restaurants and a dramatic desert backdrop.

Budget accommodation tends to be pretty spartan, with small, sparsely furnished rooms, although a number of high-profile hostels have raised the bar in the last year or so. Pay a little more – about $13 and upwards for a double room – and you can stay in a decent **mid-range hotel**, where rooms tend to be larger, with more comfortable beds, better decor, and extras like towels and


CENTRAL LA PAZ
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El Alto & Airport
Cemetery District
Sopocachi
Bus Terminal
Museo de Metales Preciosas
Museo Costumbrista
Museo Litoral
Museo Casa Murillo
PLAZA RIOSINHO
Museo de Instrumentos Musicales
Iglesia Santo Domingo
Museo de Etnografía y Folklore
Museo Nacional de Arte
Palacio Legislativo
Palacio Quemado
Cathedral
PLAZA MURILLO
TAM Office
Museo Tambo Quirquincho
PLAZA ALONSO DE MENDOZA
Mercado Lanza
PLAZA SAN FRANCISCO
Iglesia de San Francisco
Cambio
ENTEL
Cambio
Migración
LAB Office
Mercado Camacho
Museo Nacional de Arqueología Tiwanacu
PLAZA OBELISCO
Mercado de Hechicería
Museo de la Coca
MERCADO BUENOS AIRES
American Airlines
Aerosur
Museo de Arte Contemporàneo Plaza
Club Andino Boliviano
PLAZA DEL ESTUDIANTE
PLAZA SUCRE
Cárcel de San Pedro
PLAZA ANTOFAGASTA
PLAZA EGUINO
GARITA DE LIMA
AVENIDA ARMENTIA
AVENIDA MONTES
AVENIDA AMÉRICA
AVENIDA LA BANDERA
AVENIDA PERU
AVENIDA CAMACHO
AVENIDA MARISCAL SANTA CRUZ (PRADO)
AVENIDA 16 DE JULIO (PRADO)
AVENIDA BUENOS AIRES
AVENIDA BAPTISTA
AV VILLAZÓN
SUCRE
COMERCIO
POTOSÍ
MERCADO
BALLIVIAN
INGAVI
INDABURO
YUNGAS
COROICO
LOAYZA
COLÓN
AYACUCHO
SOCABAYA
BOLIVAR
JUNIN
YANACOCHA
G. SANJINEZ
PICHINCHA
JAEN
A. ALIANZA
PISAGUA
CATACORA
LAJA
BENI
LARECAJA
URUGUAY
EGUINO
INCA
PANDO
GOYZUETA
BOZO
E. VALLE
FIGUEROA
MURILLO
MANCO KAPAC
ISAAC TAMAYO
TUMUSLA
GRANEROS
ILLAMPU
SANTA CRUZ
SAGÁRNAGA
LINARES
COCHABAMBA
ORURO
TARIJA
BELZU
RODRIGUEZ
ORTEGA
TABLADA
MAX PAREDES
BARRA
SEGUROLA
GALLARDO
L. DE LA GASCA
BUENO
JUAN DE LA RIVA
MEXICO
COLOMBIA
ALMIRANTE GRAU
C. STRONGUEST
NICOLÁS ACOSTA
GONZALEZ
OTERO DE LA VEGA
CASTRILLO
LANDAETA
C. MAMANI
F. ZUAZO
CAMPERO
R. ORTIZ
TIAHUANACO
B. COLORADOS

ACCOMMODATION

Adventure Brew Hostel	C
Alojamiento El Carretero	B
Alojamiento El Solario	J
Casa de Huespedes Arthy's	D
Estrella Andina	N
Hostal Austria	E
Hostal Maya Inn	P
Hostal Naira	L
Hostal Republica	F
Hostal Sucre	T
Hostal Tamo de Oro	A
Hotel Continental	K
Hotel Fuentes	O
Hotel Galería	R
Hotel Gloria	H
Hotel Max Inn	U
Hotel Milton	S
Hotel Plaza	Q
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Hotel Rosario	M
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RESTAURANTS

100% Natural	13
La Bodeguita Cubana	3
La Casa de Los Paceños	1
Cevicheria Aquarío	16
Eli's Pizza Express	8
Layq'a	5
El Lobo	6
Manantial	H
Surucachi	17
Tambo Colonial	M
Yusseff	14

CAFÉS

Alexander Coffee Shop	18
Angelo Colonial	10
Ciudad	19
Club La Paz	2
Pepe's	7
Royal	9
Terraza	15
Zur Mole 89	20

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Oliver's Travel's	11
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cable television. In the last couple of years especially, a number of great-value mid-range options have also sprung up, obviating budget choices for all but the most cost-conscious, or those actively seeking out the backpacking scene. Ask to see a few rooms before you check in and try to choose one that gets some sunlight, as this makes a big difference in temperature at this altitude. Heating is only available in the **top-range hotels**, but everywhere listed below has hot water, which is essential in La Paz, though in budget places it's worth checking to make sure it's working. Most places will safely store luggage for you at little or no extra cost, which is very useful if you're using La Paz as a base for trekking or exploring the rest of Bolivia. As in the rest of the country, prices are always flexible to a degree (tending to fall rather than rise), and it does no harm to ask for a discount – your chances will improve outside the June–September high season or if you're part of a big group. Wherever you intend to stay, if you're arriving after dark it's a good idea to book ahead and take a Radio taxi to the hotel.

City centre

Most accommodation is conveniently located in the city centre, either in the busy market district **west of Plaza San Francisco and the Prado** (which can be noisy at night), or in the more sedate **colonial centre** to the east. It's worth bearing in mind that the steep gradients of the city's streets mean that what appears a short walk back to your hotel on the map can in fact be an exhausting climb, particularly if you haven't yet adjusted to altitude. Street crime is an increasing problem, particularly in the market district (the chaotic Mercado Buenos Aires can be dangerous even during the day), and if you're coming back late at night it's a good idea to take a Radio taxi rather than walk.

Budget

Adventure Brew Hostel Av Montes 533 ⓣ02/2461614, ⓦwww.theadventurebrewhostel.com. You have to hand it to a backpacker hostel boasting an on-site microbrewery (the world's highest, apparently). Masterminded by the moguls behind Gravity Assisted Mountain Biking, this über-hostel is so popular you'll have to book online at least 48 hours in advance (see p.112), and pay for it upfront with a credit card. If you're lucky enough to get a space (both dorms and private rooms available, plain but comfortable with private bath), you can look forward to a nifty rooftop bar with alcoholic freebies (some of the best beer in the country actually), splendid socialising options and the opportunity to stuff your face with as many breakfast pancakes as you can eat. The recently opened *Annex* 200m or so down the street offers a little more style with rooms in a restored colonial building, while solar-powered showers, hot water bottles and free DVDs as well as a convenient proximity to the bus station seal the deal. ②

Alojamiento El Solario Murillo 776 ⓣ02/2129544, ⓔturismoelsolario@yahoo.com. Decent budget option, close to Plaza San Francisco, with welcoming staff, a friendly atmosphere and cosy rooms with comfortable beds and shared bathrooms (although the ones on the lower floor are a bit of a trek) as well as a kitchen and laundry service. ②

Casa de Huespedes Arthy's Av Montes 693 ⓣ02/2281439, ⓦarthyshouse.tripod.com. A leafy favourite that's powered its way onto the backpacking scene through the Internet and word of mouth, *Arthy's* offers clean, carpeted rooms and a great location for tired legs, not to mention an emphasis on guest interaction with a TV room and communal kitchen. ③

Hostal Austria Yanacocha 531 ⓣ02/2408540, ⓔhotelaustria@acelerate.com. With its lofty ceilings and period wood and glass corridors, this busy backpackers' haunt often feels like an old schoolhouse. Although the equally dated gas heaters mean limited hot water (and a long wait for a shower when the hostel's full), rooms (all with shared bath) have an unintentionally shabby chic, 1960s minimalist feel, staff are friendly and helpful, and there's a kitchen, laundry and Internet access. ②

Hostal Tambo de Oro Av Armentia 367 ⓣ02/2281565 or 2282097, ⓕ02/2282181. A veritable labyrinth of dark, hardwood corridors snaking between dowdy rooms (with or without bath) with semi-carpeted walls and an antique, sequestered feel. Bordered by one of the city's main thoroughfares, rooms at the front can also be incredibly noisy, although there's no denying its convenience for the bus terminal. ③

Hotel Continental Av Illampu 626 ⓣ02/2129549, ⓔhotelcontinental626@hotmail.com. A friendly HI affiliate which wears its 1970s colours proudly. Wood panelling and great old Bolivian tourist-board posters lend character, and although rooms can be on the dowdy and noisy side, the lovely old top-floor, four-person apartments (complete with period kitchen, living room, musty old canvases) are great value even for small groups at US$9 per person. ③

Hotel Fuentes Linares 988 ⓣ02/2334145, ⓦwww.hotelfuentesbolivia.com. Arguably the best-value accommodation in La Paz, this family-owned hotel opened in mid-2006, providing four floors of bright, modern, pastel-yellow rooms with some great views of the city's canyon-like skyline. You can't miss the swanky exterior, and access is through a courtyard, leading you far from the hassle of Calle Linares. While a massage service, laundry and limited free Internet are welcome, the included breakfast is rather meagre. ③

Hotel Torino Socabaya 457 ⓣ02/2406003. Long-standing backpackers' favourite and still always busy, offering a shadowy maze of basic, lived-in rooms with or without bath set around an elegant colonial courtyard. The place certainly has the atmosphere of a building that's seen and done it all, yet the sometimes surly, strictly male staff, whiffy drains and ridiculously useless towels (bring your own) can make a stay here less than pleasant. ③

Posada El Carretero Catacora 1056, between Yanacocha and Junín ⓣ02/2285271. The oldest if no longer the most popular backpackers' dive in La Paz; the fact that the signing-in pen in reception is tied to the roof by string pretty much sums the place up. Basic, friendly and raucous, with communal bathrooms (also a few private), kitchen and laundry facilities, and decorated with decades of multilingual graffiti, it's akin to lodging in a funky – if surprisingly clean – squat. It's also a steep climb up from Plaza Murillo, however, and not in the safest area at night. ②

Moderate

Estrella Andina Av Illampu 716 ⓣ02/2456421, ⓔjuapame_2000@hotmail.com. Bright, fun and friendly, with dayglo, neo-indigenous murals covering every inch of wall space. Wake up to a scene of Tiwanaku on the wall of your bright spacious bedroom and play chess in a faux-Andean grotto. Buffet breakfast included. ⑤

Hostal Maya Inn Sagárnaga 339 ⓣ02/2311970, ⓔmayahost_in@hotmail.com. Now an established mid-range fixture, conveniently situated two blocks away from Plaza San Francisco. Inside it's pleasant, airy and welcoming with parquet flooring, a vivid colour scheme and period bedside lamps. Go for the brighter front-facing rooms. Breakfast is included and there's also Internet ($0.80 per hour) and a laundry service. ④

Hostal Naira Sagárnaga 161 ⓣ02/2355645, ⓕ02/2327262. One of the best value in its price range, also excellently located just up from the main Plaza. Rooms are elegant and spotlessly clean, with high, corniced ceilings, shutters and lots of light and glass, all set around a capacious colonial courtyard. The inclusive breakfast is served next door in *Café Banaís*, itself a great option even if you aren't a guest, with hideaway booths, great chocolate milkshakes and mountainous bowls of fruit, yoghurt and muesli. ⑤

Hostal Republica Comercio 1455 ⓣ02/2202742 or 2203448, ⓦwww.hostalrepublica.com. While especially handy if you've got your own vehicle (there's parking nearby, ask at reception) and you want a straight run up to Villa Fatima and on to Coroico next day, the idea of this place is often more appealing than the reality. From the outside, it's a beautifully restored old mansion set around two quiet, cobbled courtyards and a sunny garden, yet the downstairs rooms – where you'll probably be directed if you haven't booked in advance – are fairly poky, noisy and in need of a facelift (as well as comfortable pillows). The upper rooms are brighter, however, and there's a nice matrimonial right at the back, as well as a modern little five-person villa ($10 per person) with a secluded garden and chairs. Free Internet is available if you can get onto it, and the non-inclusive breakfasts – while served in charming surroundings – aren't the best. It's located three blocks from Plaza Murillo, a steep climb up from the Prado. ④–⑤

Hotel Galeria Santa Cruz 583 ⓣ02/2461015 or 2461253, ⓦwww.hotelgaleria-lapaz.com. A generous glass roof and an abundance of plants give this fourth-floor hotel (located inside a rather desolate shopping gallery) a greenhouse-like feel, especially in the sunny restaurant. The bright, tropical feel is at least partly extended to the comfortable rooms, especially those at the front. The manager is amiability personified, breakfast is included and heating is available. It's a steep climb up from Plaza San Francisco. ⑤

La Posada de la Abuela Obdulia Linares 947 ⓣ02/2332285, ⓦwww.redcotel.bo/hostal/posada.html. Don't let the long-winded name put you off; this is another exquisite mid-range option, open since mid-2006. Housed in a tastefully restored colonial mansion, rooms are furnished in fresh pine and wrought iron, built around a leafy courtyard lined with high-quality artesanía. Front facing nos 202–205 are especially inviting, with balconies looking onto Calle Linares below, and the glowing recommendations of the guest book speak for themselves. Breakfast is an inclusive all-you-can-eat buffet and there's also broadband Internet and wireless access. ⑤

Expensive

Hotel Gloria Potosí 909 ⓣ02/2407070, ⓦwww.hotelgloria.com.bo. This is the headquarters of this Bolivia-wide institution, and, like its provincial branches, it's well past its prime but has something special – in this case the restaurant – to at least partly warrant the price. Rooms (with cable TV, central heating and – at least on the upper floors – great views across the city) are comfortable enough, even if the cheesy piped music, 1980s woodchip and lurid carpets render the place hopelessly dated. The staff is friendly and breakfast is included. ⑥

Hotel Plaza Av 16 de Julio ⓣ02/2378311, ⓦwww.plazabolivia.com.bo. Within earshot of the Plaza del Estudiante, and the preferred choice of the Brazilian football team, this top-end executive option has at least made the effort to get a little arty. Floors are themed Tiwanaku or Titicaca and the walls are adorned with neo-monoliths and fantasy canvases, but it's the plate- glass windows and all-glass lift which leave the biggest impression; take the stairs if you're at all afraid of hights. The rooms are comfortable if unremarkable, while the famous top-floor restaurant has hosted the likes of Fidel Castro. Buffet breakfast included. ⑨

Hotel Presidente Potosí 920 ⓣ02/2406666, ⓦwww.hotelpresidente-bo.com. Ricky Martin's favourite when he visits town; it's worth a look for the lavish 1970s vintage of the reception alone – all swaggering chandeliers and mirrored ceilings. The centrally heated rooms are less ostentatious but still very comfortable in an upholstered kind of way. Huge windows allow light to spare, and there's the usual luxury fringe benefits like sauna, Jacuzzi and pool, as well as a restaurant with appetite-quelling vistas. ⑨

Hotel Rosario Av Illampu 704 ⓣ02/2451658 or 2119541, ⓦwww.hotelrosario.com. One of the longest-established tourist destinations in the city, the *Rosario* was finally awarded hotel status in 2006. It still feels like an LA. mansion circa 1975, but that's part of the charm. An abundance of exposed brick, dark wood and white rendered walls encloses a warren of elegant heated rooms and eccentric little corridors, all crammed in around a series of cobbled, pot-planted courtyards. A bespoke restaurant a fair-trade shop and a great rooftop café round out the experience. Bear in mind that smoking is not permitted anywhere in the hotel. Breakfast included. ⑥

El Prado, San Pedro, Miraflores and Sopocachi

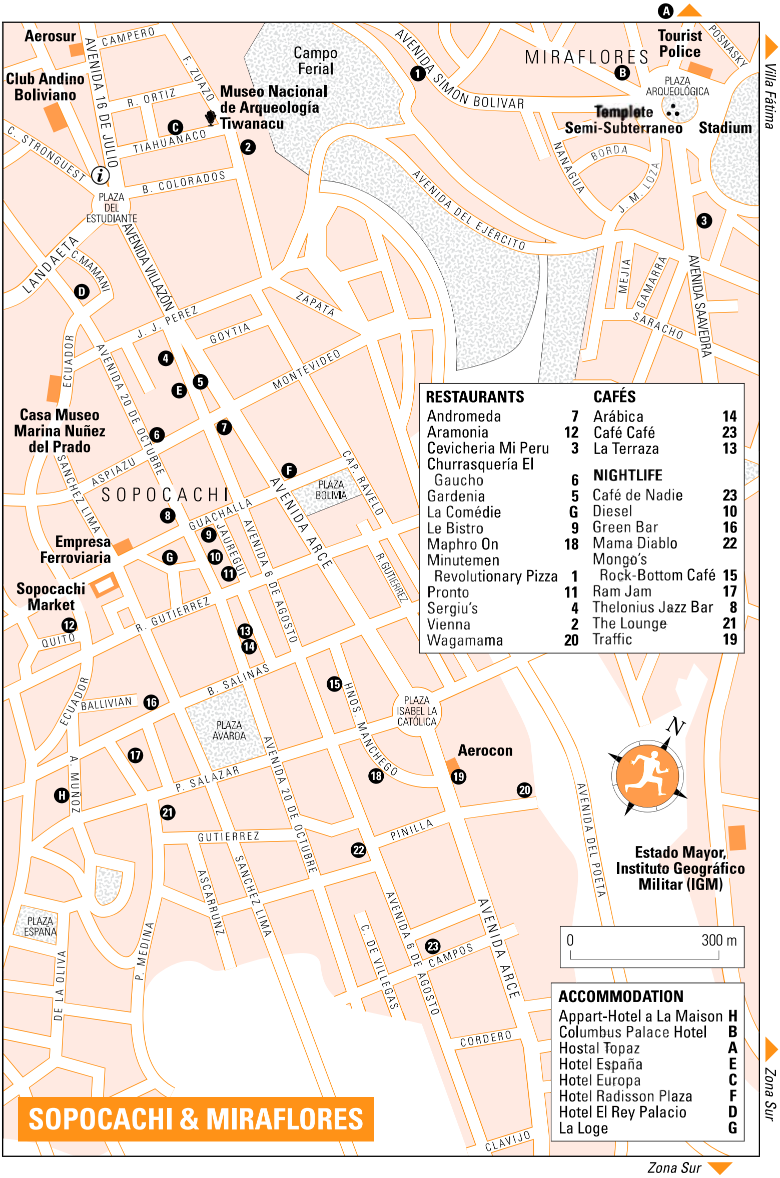
La Paz's more luxurious hotels are located **along the Prado** and in the prosperous suburb of **Sopocachi**, home to most of the city's more fashionable bars and restaurants, and a pleasant place to stroll around in the evening. There are also a couple of places to stay in **San Pedro** and **Miraflores**, relatively less frenzied suburbs on either side of the main thoroughfare, and hotels are shown on the map on p.88.

Appart-Hotel A La Maison Pasaje Muñoz Cornejo 15, Sopocachi ⓣ02/2413704, ⓦwww.alamaison-lapaz.com. Near Plaza España but cloistered within a cul-de-sac, this discreetly signposted hotel looks more like a wealthy Paceño's gated residence. Big on pastel shades, natural materials and abstract art, with a decidedly more contemporary design than its skyscraping Sopocachi neighbours, the hotel basically offers three classes of comfortable, slightly Zen-like accommodation, the most expensive – relatively speaking when compared with the business hotels – equipped with living room, dining room, kitchen and terrace, and all fitted with broadband access. ⑤–⑥

Columbus Palace Hotel Av Illimani 1990, Miraflores ⓣ02/2242444, ⓦwww.hotel-columbus.com. Another great-value mid-range option with the feel and facilities of executive level (albeit no pool or sauna). Housed in a swanky modern building looming over the Templete Semi-Subterraneo (see p.101), the lilac-carpeted rooms have business-like comfort (there's even a pillow menu) and functionality, while breakfast and a welcome drink are included in the price. ⑤

Hostal Topaz Av Saavedra 1109, Miraflores ⓣ02/2130332 or 2223082, ⓔhostaltopaz@latinmail.com. Homely *hostal* a little off the beaten track In Miraflores, but a relief from the human gridlock of Sagárnaga, especially if you're after a bit of – relative – peace and quiet. The floral wallpaper and vases means it's a bit like staying at your granny's, but sometimes that's exactly what a tired traveller needs. Rooms come with private bath and cable TV, and there's a 10 percent discount for ISIC card holders. ⑤

Hotel Europa Tiahuanaco 64 Sopocachi ☎ 02/2315656, Ⓦ www.hoteleuropa.com.bo. "A Hotel For Amazing People!" apparently, but ordinary folks can stay as well, as long as their


Aerosur
Club Andino Boliviano
Campo Ferial
Museo Nacional de Arqueología Tiwanacu
MIRAFLORES
Tourist Police
PLAZA ARQUEOLÓGICA
Templete Semi-Subterraneo
Stadium
Villa Fátima
Casa Museo Marina Nuñez del Prado
SOPOCACHI
PLAZA DEL ESTUDIANTE
PLAZA BOLIVIA
Empresa Ferroviaria
Sopocachi Market
PLAZA AVAROA
PLAZA ISABEL LA CATÓLICA
Aerocon
Estado Mayor, Instituto Geográfico Militar (IGM)
PLAZA ESPAÑA
CAMPERO
AVENIDA 16 DE JULIO
F. ZUAZO
R. ORTIZ
TIAHUANACO
C. STRONGUEST
B. COLORADOS
AVENIDA SIMON BOLIVAR
AVENIDA DEL EJÉRCITO
NANAGUA
BORDA
J. M. LOZA
POSNASKY
MEJIA
GAMARRA
SARACHO
AVENIDA SAAVEDRA
LANDAETA
C.MAMANI
AVENIDA VILLAZÓN
J. J. PEREZ
GOYTIA
ZAPATA
MONTEVIDEO
ECUADOR
AVENIDA 20 DE OCTUBRE
ASPIAZU
SANCHEZ LIMA
GUACHALLA
JAUREGUI
AVENIDA 6 DE AGOSTO
AVENIDA ARCE
CAP. RAVELO
R. GUTIERREZ
QUITO
B. SALINAS
BALLIVIAN
HNOS. MANCHEGO
A. MUÑOZ
P. SALAZAR
GUTIERREZ
PINILLA
AVENIDA DEL POETA
ASCARRUNZ
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DE LA OLIVA
C. DE VILLEGAS
CAMPOS
CORDERO
CLAVIJO
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N
Zona Sur

SOPOCACHI & MIRAFLORES

RESTAURANTS	
Andromeda	7
Aramonia	12
Cevicheria Mi Peru	3
Churrasquería El Gaucho	6
Gardenia	5
La Comédie	G
Le Bistro	9
Maphro On	18
Minutemen Revolutionary Pizza	1
Pronto	11
Sergiu's	4
Vienna	2
Wagamama	20

CAFÉS	
Arábica	14
Café Café	23
La Terraza	13

NIGHTLIFE	
Café de Nadie	23
Diesel	10
Green Bar	16
Mama Diablo	22
Mongo's	
Rock-Bottom Café	15
Ram Jam	17
Thelonius Jazz Bar	8
The Lounge	21
Traffic	19

ACCOMMODATION	
Appart-Hotel a La Maison	H
Columbus Palace Hotel	B
Hostal Topaz	A
Hotel España	E
Hotel Europa	C
Hotel Radisson Plaza	F
Hotel El Rey Palacio	D
La Loge	G

pockets are deep enough. In return they get the usual sedate, soulless, modern apartment-like rooms, all with underfloor heating and – uniquely in La Paz – automatic humidifying. Business types can avail themselves of a bilingual secretarial service, and there's also a natural herb sauna, gym, swimming pool and fine restaurant with a popular and highly regarded lunchtime buffet. ⑨

Hotel Radisson Plaza Av Arce 2177, Sopocachi ⓣ02/2441111, ⓦwww.radisson.com/lapazbo. Luxurious, fairly faceless high-rise landmark with all the facilities – spa, health club, business centre – you would expect from a first-class international hotel. There's a grand piano in reception and the flowery, padded rooms come with great views of Illimani, as does the fifteenth-floor *Aransaya Restaurant*. There's also a 100 percent satisfaction money-back guarantee, and breakfast is included. ⑨

La Loge Pasaje Medinacelli 2234 Sopocachi ⓣ02/2423561, ⓦwww.lacomedie-lapaz.com. Chic, self-catering apartments from the people who brought you *La Comédie* restaurant (see p.106). Decor is polished and low-key, with a breakfast bar-style kitchen and contemporary mosaic tile bathroom, and all rooms come equipped with Internet-ready computer. Pricey, but not quite prohibitively so. ⑥

Residencial Sucre Colombia 340, San Pedro ⓣ02/2492038, ⓕ02/2486723. Friendly and well-located *hostal*, with characterful rooms with or without bath set around a pleasant courtyard. There's also a kitchen and laundry for guests' use. ③

El Rey Palace Hotel Av 20 de Octubre 1947, Sopocachi ⓣ02/2418541, ⓦwww.hotelreypalace.com. One of the best-value upmarket options in La Paz, with big, comfortable and soberly decorated rooms, rather like a residential equivalent of a bookshop chain, right down to the piped classical music. Stained glass, plush, striped upholstery and an elegant restaurant compound the impression, while the warm, affable staff and inclusive breakfast are an added bonus. ⑦

Zona Sur

If you'd rather restrict your appreciation of La Paz's frantic charm to measured doses, or you simply want to minimize the adverse effects of altitude, the **Zona Sur** is a good option. More akin to downtown Phoenix or Tucson than an Altiplano suburb, with an upfront and spectacular Wild West backdrop, palm tree lined boulevards and a climate to match, it feels very much removed from the rest of the city. And even if you don't make it uptown, there are a number of excellent restaurants within easy walking distance. You'll need cash to spare though, as much – though not all – of the accommodation is in the top-end bracket, located within the wealthy enclave of Calacoto.

Camino Real Av Ballivián and corner of Calle 10, Calacoto ⓣ02/2792323, ⓦwww.caminoreal.com.bo. A conspicuously modern, sun-glinting skyscraper that looks much taller than its eight floors suggest. Arranged in leafy circles above an imposing black marble reception, they're home to state-of-the-art executive rooms with great canyon views. Extras include pool, sauna, wireless Internet, use of a mobile phone and even entrance to the local golf club. There's also a welcome drink and the obligatory inclusive American buffet breakfast. ⑨

Casa Grande Hotel Av Ballivián and corner of Calle 17, Calacoto ⓣ02/2795511, ⓦwww.casa-grande.com.bo. Self-consciously stylish and expensive boutique hotel sporting a design midway between warehouse minimalism and retro comfort. The reception – complete with bulging rack of glossy international magazines – is all modernist leather sofas, glass and perforated steel, while the carpeted rooms are more dated if still inviting, all equipped with kitchen, high-speed Internet connection and a daily newspaper. If you don't fancy cooking there's the colourful Mezzo Café, with a menu of trendy, fairly healthy snacks. American buffet breakfast included. ⑨

Hotel Calacoto No.8009 Calle 13 and corner of Sánchez Bustamente ⓣ02/2792524 or 2799335, ⓦwww.hotelcalacoto.com. Hidden away down a leafy, mercifully serene side street, with strikingly fresh, fragrant air, this converted hacienda has bags of character and quirky charm for a fraction of the price of its upscale neighbours. Each room has been individually styled, with eye-catching mosaic tiles, bold colour schemes, stained glass and Gothic detail, and many come with living area and kitchen facilities. Spend just a little more (⑥) and you can lodge in the cosy, slope-roofed apartments arranged around a genteel garden. Needless to say, there's an inclusive American buffet breakfast, and 35 years of experience make their nearby riding school ($30 for a twelve-class course) great value. ⑤

Hotel Oberland El Agrario 3118, Mallasa ⓣ02/2745040 or 2745818, ⓦwww.h-oberland.com.

Clean, calm, Swiss-owned hotel in the environs of Valle de la Luna, with polished, nicely appointed en-suite rooms and blinding white bed linen. There's also the rare attraction of a well-manicured garden (scene of regular BBQs and occasional press conferences and embassy bashes), facilities – wireless Internet access, swimming pool, sauna, volleyball and football – normally restricted to the top-end, and even camping provision ($3 per person) with use of a garden toilet and spa shower as well as the pool. American buffet breakfast included. ⑥

The City

In terms of conventional tourist attractions La Paz's appeal is modest. There are still some fine **colonial palaces** and **churches** in the centre of town, but in general the city's architecture is drab and functional, while the city's few **museums** scarcely do justice to Bolivia's fascinating history and culture. Most visitors are enthralled by the energy of La Paz's **street life** and its rich cultural heritage, while the absence of green areas is more than redeemed by the sight of Illimani, the majestic mountain whose permanently snow-covered 6439-metre peak dominates the landscape, and which is still revered as a powerful tutelary deity by many of the city's inhabitants.

La Paz's main commercial thoroughfare, known as **El Prado**, runs southeast through the city, its official name changing from Avenida Mariscal Santa Cruz to Avenida 16 de Julio as it heads south. The boulevard is punctuated with statues of historical figures including Bolívar, Columbus, Isabel La Católica – the fact that not one of them is Bolivian says much about the cultural orientation of the European-descended elite that continues to dominate Bolivian politics. Lined with trees – a rarity in La Paz – and with a central promenade with pleasant gardens and benches, the Prado is one of the city's few flat and spacious areas, and a popular place for strolling and socializing, though the ceaseless traffic on either side and the modern high-rise buildings that now block out much of the sun have detracted somewhat from its original charm.

The Prado runs along the course of the **Río Choqueyapu**, whose heavily polluted waters are now entombed in concrete beneath the streets. During the colonial period the river formed the border between two different worlds, with the Spanish city centre on one side and the Aymara settlements on the other, a division which is still very much in evidence today. To the east of the Prado, the **colonial city centre** is still the main commercial and government district, dominated by banks, ministries and the men in grey suits who run them. To the west of the Prado, meanwhile, the main **indigenous neighbourhoods** sweep up the steep slopes of the valley, their narrow, winding streets filled with the colour and ceaseless bustle of seemingly endless street markets.

The colonial city centre

The well-ordered streets of the colonial city centre still preserve the neat grid pattern laid out by the city founders in accordance with Spanish laws governing the foundation of settlements in the Indies. At its centre stands the **Plaza Murillo**, home to both the Palacio Presidential and the parliament building, the Palacio Legislativo. A fair number of colonial buildings still survive, though most are in a poor state of repair, their crumbling facades and dilapidated balconies obscured by tangled phone lines and electric cables. The exceptions to this are concentrated on and around the Plaza Murillo and the nearby **Calle Jaen**, both of which are also home to several **museums**.

Plaza Murillo

Though it remains the epicentre of Bolivia's political life, the **Plaza Murillo** – the main square of the colonial city centre – has an endearingly provincial feel, busy with people feeding pigeons and eating ice cream in the shade. Known as the Plaza de Armas during the colonial era, the square was renamed after independence in honour of the independence martyr Pedro Domingo Murillo, who was hanged here in 1810 after leading a failed rebellion against the colonial authorities, one of several bloody scenes the square has witnessed during Bolivia's turbulent political past. A statue of Murillo now stands at the centre of the plaza.

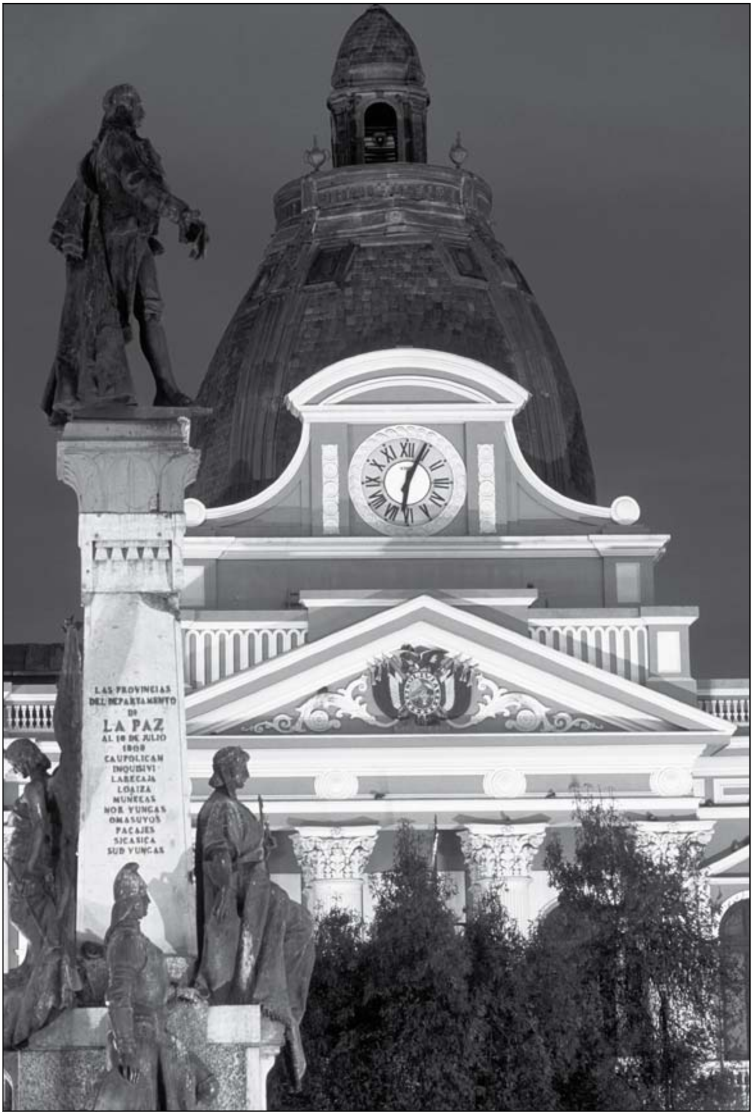
The Cathedral

On the south side of the plaza stand two great symbols of political and spiritual power in Bolivia, the Cathedral and the Palacio Presidential. With its twin belltowers and broad but rather plain Neoclassical facade, the **Cathedral** is remarkable more for the time it took to complete than for its aesthetic value. Begun in 1835 (when its colonial predecessor had to be demolished due to structural problems), it wasn't inaugurated until 1925, and was finally completed only in 1989 in a last-minute rush before a visit by Pope John Paul II. The cool, vaulted interior is relatively unadorned, in contrast to La Paz's many Baroque churches; its most unusual feature is a stained-glass window depicting former presidents Mariscal Andrés de Santa Cruz and General José de Ballivián and their families receiving blessings from on high, a surprisingly explicit expression of the historic conflation in Bolivia of church, military and state. One of Bolivia's most revered former presidents, Santa Cruz (see p.398), was reburied in a small side chapel of the cathedral in 1965, a century after he died in exile in France.

In a crypt underneath the Cathedral – the entrance is just south of the plaza on Calle Socabaya – the **Museo de Arte Sacro de la Catedral** (Tues–Fri 9am–12.30pm & 3–7pm, Sat & Sun 9am–1pm; $0.80) houses a small collection of colonial religious art. As well as paintings, there's plenty of extravagant silverwork and sculpture, including the **Virgen de la Paz**, a fine wooden carving of the city's patron which was brought from Seville in the sixteenth century. The Virgin's devotional cult reached a peak during the siege in 1781, when she was widely credited with saving the city from indigenous rebels.

The Palacio Presidencial and Palacio Legislativo

Next door to the Cathedral stands the elegant Neoclassical **Palacio Presidencial**, its ceremonial guards in red nineteenth-century uniforms from the War of the Pacific discreetly backed up by military policemen with more modern equipment. The palace isn't open to the public, but the guards may let you have a look at the central courtyard when the president is not in residence. Completed in 1852, the palace is generally known as the **Palacio Quemado** – the "Burnt Palace" – after it was badly damaged by fire in 1875 during one of the more violent of Bolivia's many revolutionary episodes. Rebels opposed to the then-president, Tomas Frias, set the palace alight after repeated attempts to storm it failed. The following morning the bodies of some 130 people killed in the fighting were strewn across the square and in nearby streets. In front of the Cathedral a bust of former president Gualberto Villaroel provides a reminder of a more successful, if equally gruesome, revolutionary attempt which occurred in 1946, when Villaroel – at the mercy of popular anger after brutally repressing opponents on both sides of the political spectrum – was thrown from a palace window by a mob and hanged


LAS PROVINCIAS
DEL DEPARTAMENTO
DE
LA PAZ
AL 16 DE JULIO
1809
CAUPOLICAN
INQUISIVI
LARECAJA
LOAIZA
MUÑECAS
NOR YUNGAS
OMASUYOS
PACAJES
SICASICA
SUD YUNGAS

▲ Palacio Presidencial

from a lamppost. On the east side of the plaza is the **Palacio Legislativo**, the seat of the Bolivian parliament, which was built in a similar Neoclassical style in the early twentieth century on the site previously occupied by the Jesuit headquarters until their expulsion from the Spanish Empire in 1767. Even this hasn't been immune to the worst effects of Bolivia's tumultuous political climate, with a miner infamously blowing himself up inside the building as recently as 2004, in protest at the lack of retirement provision.

The Museo Nacional de Arte

On the southwest corner of the plaza the **Palacio de Los Condes de Arana**, one of La Paz's finest surviving colonial palaces, now houses the **Museo Nacional de Arte** (Tues–Sat 9am–12.30pm & 3–7pm, Sun 9am–12.30pm; Ⓦwww.mna.org.bo; $1.25), well worth visiting for its comprehensive collection of works by major Bolivian painters. Completed in 1775, when La Paz was at the peak of its colonial prosperity, the palace (also known as the Palacio de Diez Medina – it's not clear exactly who had it built) is a magnificent example of Baroque architecture, with a grand portico opening onto a central patio overlooked by three floors of arched walkways, all elaborately carved from pink granite in a Rococo style with stylized shells, flowers and feathers. The emphasis of the museum's art collection is firmly on colonial religious art. Amongst the highlights are several works by **Melchor Pérez de Holguín**, the great master of Andean colonial painting, and a magnificent eighteenth-century picture by an anonymous La Paz artist of an Archangel Arquebusero, an iconic image of an angel carrying a primitive firearm which neatly encapsulates the spiritual–military contradictions of the Spanish conquest. The museum's recent renovation has made specific provision for more visiting exhibition space, recently hosting works by painter/sculptor Diego Morales Barrera, whose treatment under the brutal early 1980s regime of Luis Garcia Meza led him to asylum in Switzerland.

Along Calle Ingavi

A block northeast from Plaza Murillo along Calle Ingavi, the **Iglesia Santo Domingo** boasts a richly detailed eighteenth-century facade in mestizo-Baroque style. Carved from soft white stone, the facade exemplifies the intimate combination of Spanish and indigenous symbolism which is characteristic of Andean colonial architecture, with delicately carved trees, grapes and pome-granates (typical Spanish Baroque devices representing the Eucharist) intermingled with New World fruits and parrots. The main body of the church dates from the mid-seventeenth century, when the Dominicans took a leading role in the evangelization of the Andes, while the interior was remodelled in the nineteenth century in rather anodyne Neoclassical style.

Set inside an elegant colonial mansion a little further down Calle Ingavi is the small but rewarding **Museo de Etnografía y Folklore** (Ⓣ02/2358559; Tues–Sat 9am–12.30pm & 3–7pm, Sun 9am–12.30pm; free), housed in a seventeenth-century mansion built for the Marques de Villaverde, whose coat of arms looks down on the central patio from an exquisite mestizo-Baroque portico, complete with floral designs, parrots and feline figures. The mansion's street facade boasts the only surviving example of the elegant carved wooden balconies which were common in colonial La Paz.

Inside, the museum has exhibitions on two of Bolivia's most distinctive indigenous cultures. One room concentrates on the **Chipayas**, or Uros, a minority ethnic group which has been displaced from much of its territory by Aymara groups and now subsists on the watery margins of the great lakes of the southern Altiplano. The other focuses on the Quechua-speaking **Tarabucos** from the highlands east of Sucre, whose colourful striped ponchos and hats in the shape of the helmets of Spanish conquistadors are widely used to represent the "exoticism" of Bolivia to the outside world. Both rooms are well laid out, with good explanations and plenty of photos, models, weavings and other artefacts from the two groups' fascinating cultures. Given the phenomenal cultural diversity of Bolivia, though, it's a shame the museum isn't more extensive. For those interested in further research, the museum also hosts an extensive, free-to-use ethnographic **library**, which is open to the public.

Calle Jaen and the municipal museums

A short walk uphill along Calle Gerardo Sanjinez and then left along Calle Indaburo brings you to the foot of **Calle Jaen**, the best-preserved colonial street in La Paz and home to no fewer than four **municipal museums** (all Tues–Fri 9.30am–12.30pm & 3–7pm, Sat & Sun 9am–1pm). A narrow cobbled street lined with whitewashed houses adorned with elegant wooden balconies, red-tiled roofs and carved stone doorways opening onto quiet courtyards, Calle Jaen could almost be in a small town in Andalucia or Extremadura, so strong is the Spanish feel. Originally known as Cabracancha ("Goat Enclosure"), the street was renamed in honour of Apollinar Jaen, a co-conspirator of the independence leader Pedro Domingo Murillo. Both lived in this street, and the opulence of their homes makes you realize quite how much they had to lose when they launched their ill-fated rebellion against Spanish rule: that they were prepared to risk what must have been comfortable existences reflects well on the strength of their idealism.

The four municipal museums are all accessed on a single ticket ($0.50), which is only sold at the **Museo Costumbrista Juan de Vargas**, at the top of the street (Ⓣ02/2378478; the entrance is just around the corner on Calle Sucre). Set inside a renovated colonial mansion, this museum gives a good introduction to the folkloric customs of the Altiplano, in particular the traditional dances and processions that form a central part of the region's religious fiestas. Amongst the exhibits is a small collection of the elaborate costumes and grotesque masks worn in dances such as the *Waka-Waka,* which ridicules the Spanish by aping the antics of bullfighters, with one dancer dressed as a bull; and the *Morenos*, whose performers represent colonial-era African slaves, the bulging eyes and lolling tongues of their lurid black masks evidence of the strange exoticism such figures must have held to contemporary Andean eyes. Look out too for the monstrous *Danzante* mask, whose wearer used to be expected to dance until he literally dropped dead, thereby ensuring a drought- and disease-free year for his community. There is also a series of richly detailed ceramic dioramas of colonial scenes, ranging from comic scenes of drunken fiestas complete with traditional dance troupes through to the hanging of independence hero Domingo Murillo and the execution of the eighteenth-century Aymara revolutionary Tupac Katari, who was torn apart by four horses.

Housed in the same building but accessed from Calle Jaen, the **Museo Litoral** is dedicated to one of Bolivia's national obsessions: the loss of its coastline to Chile during the nineteenth century War of the Pacific (see p.399). Unless you share that obsession, however, the collection of old uniforms, photos of the lost ports, and maps justifying Bolivia's claim to the coast is not very inspiring. Next door, the **Museo de Metales Preciosas** has a small but impressive hoard of Inca and Tiwanaku gold ornaments, housed in a steel vault. Informative displays explain the techniques used by pre-Columbian goldsmiths, and the delicate skill evident in the work makes it obvious why these indigenous artisans were so quickly enrolled into producing religious artwork by the Spanish. On the other side of the road, inside the sumptuous mansion which was once the home of the venerated independence martyr after whom it's now named, the **Museo Casa Murillo** houses an eclectic collection ranging from colonial religious art and portraits of former presidents to artefacts used in witchcraft and miniatures from past Alasitas fiestas (see p.97). Particularly interesting are a painting of La Paz during the siege of 1781, which gives a good idea of the size and layout of the colonial city, and a sixteenth-century version of the Roman Catholic creed, written in hieroglyphics on sheepskin, which was apparently used by missionaries in the conversion of indigenous people.

Set around yet another pretty colonial courtyard a little further down Calle Jaen, the delightful **Museo de Instrumentos Musicales de Bolivia** (☎02/2408177; daily 9.30am–1.30pm & 2–6.30pm; $0.63) is home to an astonishing variety of handmade musical instruments from all over Bolivia, some of which you can play with in-house lessons at competitive rates. A collection of pre-Columbian pipes and drums is followed by a plethora of the stringed instruments – guitars, violins, mandolins and charangos – which were introduced by the Spanish and eagerly seized upon by the indigenous population, who quickly combined these two elements to create the distinctive Andean music of today.

Plaza San Francisco and the market district

At the north end of the Prado, **Plaza San Francisco** is the gateway to the main Aymara neighbourhoods of La Paz, which climb up the slopes of the valley to the west. Founded in the colonial era as the *parroquias de Indios* – the Indian parishes – these neighbourhoods were where the Aymara population from the surrounding countryside was encouraged to settle, living around churches built as part of the effort to convert them to Christianity; less idealistically, this separate indigenous quarter was also designed as a pool of cheap labour, neatly separated from the Spanish city by the Río Choqueyapu. Today the area retains a very strong Aymara identity and its narrow, winding and at times almost vertical streets are filled with the bustling markets that make it one of the most vibrant and distinctive parts of the city, nowhere more so than in the **Mercado de Hechicería** – without doubt one of the most extraordinary sights in La Paz.

Plaza San Francisco

Though the frenetic traffic running alongside detracts from its charm, the **Plaza San Francisco** is the focal point for the city's Aymara population and one of the liveliest plazas in La Paz, busy with people enjoying snacks and juices or crowding around the many comedians, storytellers, magicians and sellers of miracle cures who come here to ply their trade. It's also the usual focus of the city's frequent **political protests**, and if you're in La Paz for more than a few days you're likely to witness a march by striking teachers, unemployed miners, indebted small traders or whichever social or political group has taken to the streets that week. Such marches are a constant feature of Bolivia's political life and very much part of the democratic process in a country that has only recently emerged from the shadow of military dictatorship. They're usually colourful pieces of political theatre, but they can sometimes provoke heavy-handed responses from the authorities, and clashes between police and demonstrators involving the fairly unrestrained use of tear gas are not uncommon.

On the west side of the plaza stands the **Iglesia de San Francisco**, the most beautiful colonial church in La Paz. First built in 1549 as the headquarters of the Franciscans' campaign to christianize Alto Peru, the original structure collapsed under a heavy snowfall early in the seventeenth century. Most of what you see today was built between 1750 and 1784, financed by donations from mine owners. The richly decorated facade is a classic example of the mestizo-Baroque style, showing clear indigenous influence, with carved anthropomorphic figures reminiscent of pre-Columbian sculpture as well as more common birds and intertwined floral designs. Above the main door is a statue of St Francis himself, facing towards the old city with his arms held aloft. Inside, the walls of the church are lined with extravagantly carved altarpieces where smiling angels and abundant gold leaf frame gruesome depictions of the crucifixion or images of individual saints that are the principal objects of veneration for those who come here to pray. San Judas Tadeo, the patron saint of the poor and miserable, is particularly popular amongst indigenous supplicants. To the right of the altar, the neon halos on a figure of San Antonio carrying an infant Christ add a bizarre touch of modernity to the Baroque extravaganza. In July 2005, the elegant brick cloisters of the Centro Cultural – Museo San Francisco (daily 9am–6pm; Ⓦ http://ofmsanfranciscolapaz.org/CentroCultural-MuseoSanFrancisco/informaciones.html; $2.50) opened to the public after a million-dollar restoration project, exhibiting the religious art, furniture and implements of the resident Franciscans, as well as their original living quarters.

To your right as you face the church, the plaza is overlooked by a bizarre modern statue known as the **Pucara**, crowned by abstract figures of huddled Aymara women and with a massive carving of the head of the Mariscal Andrés de Santa Cruz at its foot looking down the avenue that bears his name – its exact meaning (if any) remains obscure.

Calle Sagárnaga

To the south of the Iglesia de San Francisco is **Calle Sagárnaga**, La Paz's main tourist street, crowded with hotels, tour agencies, restaurants, handicraft shops and stalls. It's sometimes referred to rather dismissively as "Gringo Alley", though to be fair, catering to travellers has always been Calle Sagárnaga's main function: in the colonial era, this was where wayfarers en route between Potosí and the Peruvian coast would be put up, and several of the buildings now occupied by hotels were actually built for that purpose in the eighteenth century.

▲ Iglesia de San Francisco

Ekeko: the household god of abundance

One of Bolivia's most unusual fiestas is the **Feria de Alasitas**, held in La Paz in the last week of January, when large areas of the city are taken over by market stalls selling all manner of miniature items. At the centre of the festivities is a diminutive figure of a mustachioed man with rosy cheeks and a broad smile, dressed in a tiny suit and hat and laden with foodstuffs and material possessions. This is the **Ekeko**, the household god of abundance. A common sight in Paceño homes, the Ekeko is a demanding god who must be kept happy with regular supplies of alcohol, cigarettes and miniature gifts. In return, he watches over the household, ensuring happiness and prosperity and returning in kind any gift he receives. At the fair each year, people buy objects they desire in miniature to give to Ekeko, thereby ensuring that the real thing will be theirs before the year is out. Originally, gifts to the Ekeko would have been farm animals and foodstuffs, but in the modern urban context of La Paz, miniature cars, houses, electrical goods, wads of dollar bills and even airline tickets and university degrees are preferred to more traditional items.

Some anthropologists believe the Ekeko is a modern manifestation of **Thunupa**, an ancient Aymara deity who somehow survived the extirpation of idolatry through which the Spanish Inquisition sought to wipe out pre-Christian rituals. His new incarnation is thought to date from the siege of La Paz during the great indigenous rebellion of 1781. During the terrible famine suffered by the defenders, the Aymara maid of the wife of the governor of La Paz, Sebastián de Segurola, stayed alive thanks to food smuggled to her by her lover, who was serving in the rebel army. Seeing her mistress on the point of starvation, she took pity and shared some of the food with her. When Segurola returned from a day's fighting in defence of the city walls, he was amazed to find his wife still alive, and asked the maid how she had come by the food. Anxious to protect her lover, the maid told him it had been miraculously provided by the small statue of Thunupa she kept in her room. Convinced a miracle had occurred, when the siege finally ended Segurola decreed a celebratory fiesta on January 24 to give thanks to the Virgin of La Paz. Most Paceños, however, accepted the maid's story that her little idol had been responsible, and the buying and selling of miniature goods to give to idols (now suitably disguised as mustachioed gentlemen to hide their pagan origin) soon became an integral part of the festivities for Aymara, mestizos and whites alike.

Mercado de Hechicería

Two blocks up Sagárnaga on Calle Linares is the daily **Mercado de Hechicería**, or Witches' Market, which provides a fascinating window on the usually secretive world of Aymara mysticism and herbal medicine. The stalls here are heavily laden with a colourful cornucopia of ritual and medicinal items, ranging from herbal cures for minor ailments like rheumatism or stomach pain to incense, coloured sweets, protective talismans and dried llama foetuses. These items are combined in packages known as *mesas* or *pagos* and burned or buried as offerings to placate the various tutelary spirits and magical beings that are believed to hold sway over all aspects of daily life. There's no clear border between the medicinal and magical here: the *Yatiris* and *Kallawayas* – indigenous traditional healers – who are the market's main customers adopt a holistic approach in which a herbal cure for a specific symptom is usually combined with magical efforts to address the imbalances in the supernatural world that may be responsible for the ailment. Most visitors just wander around the market ogling the bizarre variety of goods on offer, but to get some insight into the uses and meaning of it all, it's worth chatting with the stallholders and perhaps making a purchase or two. Spending a few bolivianos on, say, a magic charm to protect you during your travels will certainly make the stallholders more talkative and amenable to having their photos taken, and could even prove to be a wise investment.

Museo de la Coca

Also on Calle Linares, a block south of Sagárnaga, is the excellent **Museo de la Coca** (daily 10am–7pm; Ⓦwww.cocamuseum.com; $1), dedicated to the small green leaf which is both the central religious and cultural sacrament of the Andes and the raw material for the manufacture of cocaine. Crammed into a couple of small rooms, the museum gives a good overview of the history, chemistry, cultivation and uses of this most controversial of plants, imaginatively illustrated and explained in English and Spanish. There are excellent photos showing the cultivation and processing of coca – along with military attempts to eradicate it – and of its manifold uses: as a herbal medicine and ritual sacrament by Andean campesinos; as a means of warding off hunger and exhaustion by Bolivian miners; and, transformed into cocaine, as a recreational stimulant by needle- and pipe-wielding Westerners.

Other exhibits include one of the massive wooden presses that were once used to compress the leaves for transport on the backs of mules, and a mock-up of a clandestine laboratory complete with all the chemicals necessary to turn coca into cocaine. A good selection of the packaging of some of the many modern **medicines** derived from coca underlines its continuing industrial uses, despite the rhetoric of the war on drugs. There's also a fascinating and revealing collection of posters and other advertisements for the many non-medicinal cocaine-based products that were marketed worldwide before it was declared illegal. These include Vino Mariano, a cocaine-infused wine endorsed by a gold medal from Pope Leon XIII; and **Coca-Cola**, whose early adverts claimed it relieved exhaustion, which given the fact that it originally contained cocaine is entirely believable. One of the more surprising revelations is that, despite US anti-drugs rhetoric, the world's most popular soft drink still contains coca extract – according to the museum, in 1995 the Coca-Cola corporation imported over 200 tons of the leaf.

The Mercado Buenos Aires

Three blocks further up Sagárnaga, a right turn along Calle Max Paredes takes you into the heart of the **Mercado Buenos Aires**, also known as the **Huyustus**, an old indigenous name for the district. Centred on the intersection of Max Paredes with Calle Buenos Aires, this is where La Paz's Aymara majority conduct their daily business, a vast open-air market sprawling over some thirty city blocks where anything and everything is bought and sold. Street after street is lined with stalls piled high with all manner of goods: sacks of sweet-smelling coca leaf and great mounds of brightly coloured tropical fruit from the Yungas; enormous heaps of potatoes from the Altiplano; piles of smelly, silver-scaled fish from Lago Titicaca; stacks of stereos and televisions smuggled across the border; endless racks laden with the latest imitation designer clothes. Behind almost every stall sits or stands a bowler-hatted Aymara woman, calling out her wares or counting out small change from the deep pockets of her apron, often with a baby strapped to her back or sleeping in a bundle nearby, oblivious to the cacophonous din of the market all around. Other stallholders sell the inexpensive drinks, meals and snacks that keep the market traders going through the day, ladling soup from steaming cauldrons, blending juices on wheeled trolleys, or hawking spicy *salteñas* from portable trays. Away from the main roads the streets are usually overrun with pedestrians, but every so often a taxi will nudge its way through, horn blaring, or the crowds will part to make room for yet another truck unloading the latest consignment of goods which flow into the city to meet the market's insatiable demands.

Highlights of the market include the numerous workshops above **Calle Buenos Aires** where the elaborate masks and costumes for dancers in the city's main fiestas are made, and the shops and stalls along **Calle Max Paredes** selling the bowler hats, knee-length laced boots and endless petticoats favoured by Aymara women. Though they are cheap and plentiful, the quality of the goods available in the street is not particularly high, and it's not really a place to come looking for souvenirs. Like most markets, it's also a favourite haunt of thieves and pickpockets, and the area is best avoided completely after dark.

Museo Tambo Quirquincho

Just north of Plaza San Francisco is Plaza Alonso de Mendoza, a pleasant square named after the founder of La Paz, whose statue stands at its centre. On the southern side of the square, the **Museo Tambo Quirquincho** (Tues–Fri 9.30am–12.30pm & 3–7pm, Sat & Sun 9am–1pm; $0.13) is one of the most varied and interesting in La Paz, with an eclectic collection focusing on the city's culture and history. Exhibits include an extensive collection of grotesque yet beautiful folkloric masks; several rooms full of quaint old photos of La Paz, which give a good impression of life in the city in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; and a room dedicated to the city's quintessential icon, the **chola** (see below).

La chola paceña

One of the most striking images in La Paz is that of the ubiquitous **cholas paceñas**, the Aymara and mestiza women dressed in voluminous skirts and bowler hats who dominate much of the day-to-day business in the city's endless markets. The word *chola* (*cholo* for men) was originally a derogatory term used to refer to indigenous women who moved to the city and adopted the lifestyle of urban mestizos, but now refers more to women who were born in La Paz (*paceñas*) and are proud of their urban indigenous identity.

The distinctive dress of the *chola* is derived from seventeenth-century Spanish costumes, which indigenous women were obliged to copy under colonial rule. The crucial element of the outfit is the **pollera**, layered skirts made from lengths of material up to 5m long, which are wrapped around the waist and reinforced with numerous petticoats to emphasize the width of the wearer's hips. These skirts can make women appear almost as wide as they are tall, and represent a glorious celebration of a very distinct ideal of female beauty. The *pollera* is worn in combination with knee-high boots, an elaborate lacy blouse, a shawl wrapped around the shoulders and a felt bowler or derby hat. The **bowler hats** became common attire in the 1930s, though the origins of this fashion are somewhat mysterious. Some say the style was adopted from the hats worn by gringo mining and railway engineers; others that the trend was started by a businessman who erroneously imported a job lot of bowler hats from Europe and struck on the idea of marketing them as women's headgear.

The *chola* costume was originally confined to the wealthier mestiza women of La Paz, but has since become widespread amongst Aymara migrants in the city and across the Altiplano. Complete outfits can cost about a month's salary, and many women spend far more, opting for lavish materials, elaborate embroidery and extravagant jewellery in an outward show of pride in commercial success. The acceptability of the *chola* as one of the central icons of La Paz and an expression of pride in indigenous culture was confirmed in 1989, when **Remedios Loza** became the first woman to take a seat in the Bolivian Congress dressed in full *chola* regalia.

The museum is set inside a beautifully restored eighteenth-century **Tambo**, a compound which served during the colonial era both as accommodation and marketplace for Aymaras from the surrounding countryside when they came to the city to sell agricultural produce. The *tambo* was owned and under the protection of the *cacique* Quirquincho, and he was in turn under the protection of the king of Spain – hence the crown carved on the arch above the main entrance, a symbol Spaniards were not allowed to use. The ornate mestizo-Baroque arches around the main courtyard were recovered from the ruins of the Conceptionist nunnery on Calle Genaro Sanjines after it was torn down to build a cinema.

San Pedro, Miraflores and Sopocachi

South of Plaza San Francisco, the busy, tree-lined Prado passes between the peaceful suburb of **San Pedro** – whose **prison** now attracts travellers jaded with more traditional tourist attractions – and the more modern neighbourhood of **Miraflores**, before reaching the relatively wealthy suburb of **Sopocachi**, home to the modest **Museo Nacional de Arqueología**, as well as some of the city's best restaurants and a lively nightlife.

Plaza Sucre and the Carcél de San Pedro

Two blocks southwest of the Prado along Calle Colombia is **Plaza Sucre**, the centre of **San Pedro**, one of the city's oldest suburbs. Also known as the Plaza San Pedro, the square's peaceful and well-tended gardens surround a statue of Bolivia's first president, the Venezuelan General Antonio José de Sucre, and are popular with portrait photographers with ancient box cameras. On the plaza's southeast side is the pretty **Iglesia de San Pedro**, built in the late eighteenth century after the original structure was burnt to the ground by rebels in 1781 during the siege of La Paz. Its most notable feature is a magnificent gilded Baroque altarpiece, which dates from 1714 and is thought to have been brought here from the Jesuit church of Loreto which used to stand on the Plaza Murillo.

On the southeast side of the square rises the formidable bulk of the **Cárcel de San Pedro**, in recent years one of La Paz's most unusual tourist attractions yet now all but closed to foreigners. Though visiting a jail full of hardened criminals, many of them sentenced for violent crimes, may have seemed a rather macabre idea, a tour of the prison offered some surprising insights into Bolivian society. The inside of the prison is like a microcosm of Bolivian society: there are shops, restaurants and billiard halls, and prisoners with money can live quite well. Comfortable cells in the nicer areas change hands for thousands of dollars, and many inmates have cell phones and satellite televisions. Like the city on the other side of the walls, the prison is divided into rich and poor neighbourhoods, with the most luxurious area reserved for big-time drug traffickers, white-collar criminals and corrupt politicians: recent residents have included a former mayor of La Paz. Those without any income, however, sleep in the corridors and struggle to survive on the meagre official rations. Family visitors seem to come and go regularly, and some children live inside with their fathers. The presence of guards is minimal and drink and drugs seem to be widely available, though if you do somehow get in, trying to take drugs out is the best way to make your stay last longer than you intended.

Sopocachi and around

Right on the Prado at Av 16 de Julio 1698 is the **Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Plaza** (daily 9am–9pm; $1.25), an impressive showcase of both homegrown and international talent housed in a stunning nineteenth-century mansion. Amid the Gustave Eiffel stained glass and gilded staircases hang works which span the last six decades and the whole artistic spectrum, from vibrant indigenous oil paintings and political portraiture to US sculptor Richard Hallier's balletic poise and Cochabama-born Hans Hoffman's (*not* the famous abstract expressionist) powerful *Minero Crucificado*, strikingly wrought from soldered iron.

Shortly before the Prado ends at Plaza del Estudiante, a left turn down the steps and two blocks along Calle Tiahuanaco brings you to the **Museo Nacional de Arqueología Tiwanacu** (☎02/2311621; Mon–Fri 9am–12.30pm & 3–7pm, Sat 10am–12.30pm & 3–6.30pm; $1.25). Set inside a bizarre neo-Tiwanaku building that was originally home to the naturalized Bolivian archeologist Arthur Posnansky, who led some of the first serious excavations at Tiwanaku (see p.389), the museum has a reasonable collection of textiles, ceramics and stone sculptures from the Inca and Tiwanaku cultures, though the exhibits are poorly explained. Amongst the more eye-catching items is a collection of post-conquest Inca drinking cups, known as *kerus*, painted and carved with human faces, one of which is clearly chewing coca. Also interesting is a selection of drug paraphernalia from the Tiwanaku era, including long wooden tubes used for snorting powerful hallucinogens.

There are a few more Tiwanaku sculptures on display outside the National Stadium over in the district of **Miraflores**, about 1km to the northeast, in a sunken open-air museum known as the **Templete Semi-Subterraneo** (open 24hr; free). The Templete is based on the identically named structure at Tiwanaku, and the sculptures here include the Bennett monolith, a seven-metre-high statue whose intricate carvings have been interpreted as a Tiwanaku solar and lunar calendar more exact than our own. Sadly, air pollution is taking its toll on the statues and the busy traffic intersection is hardly ideal for contemplation. Unless you really don't have time to make it to Tiwanaku itself it's scarcely worth the trouble.

Another worthy sight in Miraflores is the **Museo de Textiles Andinos Bolivianos**, right on Plaza Benito Juárez (Mon–Sat 9.30am–noon & 3–6.30pm, Sun 10am–12.30pm; ☎02/2243601; $1.88), the permanent home since 1999 of a fairly exhaustive collection of indigenous textiles exhibited in various locations since the late 1970s. Geographically arranged, the brilliance and intricacy of the weavings testify to the ethno-specific nature of their creators' traditions, as well as the wider cosmological significance. There's also a shop where you can purchase premium-quality material in the knowledge that most of the money will go directly to the producers.

To the south of the Plaza del Estudiante at the end of the Prado lies the middle-class suburb of **Sopocachi**, the city's most pleasant residential area and home to many of its more upmarket restaurants and nightlife spots – the centre is around the parallel avenues 6 de Agosto and 20 de Octubre. A few blocks from Plaza Estudiante at Avenida Ecuador 2034, the **Casa Museo Marina Núñez del Prado** (Tues–Fri 9am–12.30pm & 3–7pm, Sat 10am–12.30pm & 3–6pm, Sun 9am–1pm; $1.20) is dedicated to the work of Bolivia's most famous modern artist, Marina Nuñez del Prado, whose abstract stone sculptures of indigenous women, condors and llamas, while clearly influenced by European sculptors like Henry Moore, nevertheless have an inspired, earthy quality which captures something of the austere beauty and the intimate relationship between humans and nature in the Andean World.

The Zona Sur and El Alto

With the dramatic growth of its population in recent decades, La Paz has grown to fill the immediate confines of the Choqueyapu valley and further expanded in two directions: down the canyon to the southeast, into a series of new suburbs collectively known as the **Zona Sur**, and up onto the Altiplano around the airport, where the settlement of **El Alto** is now recognized as a separate city. Separated by almost 1000m in altitude, the two areas represent the two extremes of Bolivian society.

The Zona Sur

From Plaza del Estudiante at the end of the Prado in Sopocachi, Avenida Villazon heads southeast, turning into Avenida Arce and then winding down into the **Zona Sur**, where the upmarket suburbs of **Calacoto**, **San Miguel** and **Cota Cota** are home to a growing number of La Paz's wealthier residents, including politicians, senior military officers, and most of the foreign business and diplomatic community. Just 5m or so away from central La Paz but almost 500m lower in altitude, the Zona Sur has a noticeably warmer climate and feels much closer in style to suburban USA than to the rest of La Paz, with little other than the surrounding mountains to remind you that you're in Bolivia. The juxtaposition of luxury boutiques and villas with the harsh badlands landscape verges on the surreal, and the contrast with the rest of La Paz is striking. If you're passing through on the way to the Muela del Diablo (see p.125) or the Valle de la Luna (see p.125), it's worth stopping for a drink in one of the many cafés just to get an impression of how the city's elite live. If you're in Cota Cota, the modest **Museo de Historia Natural** (Mon–Fri 8.30am–4pm, Sat & Sun 9am–noon & 2–5pm; $0.63), on Calle 26 a short walk up from the main square, is worth a brief visit for its giant fossilized bones of prehistoric mammals, as is the **Zoo** in Mallasa (see p.125).

El Alto

At the opposite extreme in every sense from the Zona Sur is **El Alto**, the huge urban sprawl that has grown up over the last few decades around the airport on the rim of the Altiplano overlooking La Paz. At over 4000m above sea level, El Alto enjoys beautiful views along the length of the snowcapped Cordillera Real, and the views of La Paz from the rim of the Altiplano are spectacular, even if they contrast sharply with the physical ugliness of the city itself. Populated largely by Aymara migrants from the surrounding Altiplano, when it was officially recognized as a separate municipality from La Paz in 1986, El Alto instantly became the fourth biggest, poorest and fastest growing city in Bolivia.

With a population fast approaching one million (sixty percent of whom are under 25 years old), El Alto resembles a vast, impoverished yet dynamic suburb, its endless stretches of tin-roofed adobe shacks and often half-finished red-brick buildings broken only by the strangely minaret-like spires of churches and an increasing number of shops and businesses, industrial warehouses and endless lines of scruffy garages. Much of the population has no access to running water or electricity, employment is scarce and freezing night-time temperatures make it a desperately harsh place to live. But migrants continue to arrive, and there's a keen sense of a separate identity amongst the residents of what was previously considered merely a satellite settlement of La Paz. Many Alteños maintain close links with the Altiplano communities they came from, often moving between the two according to the agricultural season, and this emerging urban–rural identity is combined with a fierce pride in their Aymara culture and a recognition that moving to the city does not inevitably entail abandoning their traditions. Alteños take pride in their collective struggle against adversity and the challenges of urban life in what they refer to as the biggest indigenous city in the Americas, and denigrate La Paz, where many of them work, as *la hoyada* – the hole.

While climatic conditions may be grim, the city's unique geographical proximity to La Paz has traditionally afforded it considerable political leverage. Roadblocks in and out of the capital and the airport have been a familiar feature of the upheavals of the last decade, and residents accounted for many of the fatalities during the so-called "gas war" of 2003, when their resistance ultimately resulted in the toppling of President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada. Uruguayan social researcher Raúl Zibechi has gone so far as to dub El Alto "the most significant rebel city in Latin America", and there's no question that its self-reliance and grass-roots mobilization has given rise to one of the most radical and powerful collective political voices in the country's history.

As the poorest city in the country, however, El Alto is far from being a conventional tourist attraction, and you'll probably see enough to get an impression of the place travelling to and from the airport or by bus from La Paz to other parts of Bolivia (in fact you'll probably be heartily sick of it after repeatedly enduring its worsening traffic gridlock, especially if you're actually driving). But if you do want to spend some time in this harsh but fascinating environment, it's worth going up on a Thursday or Sunday when a huge **market** is held in the streets around the **Plaza 16 de Julio**, in La Ceja.

Eating

La Paz has an excellent range of **restaurants**, **cafés** and **street stalls** to suit pretty much all tastes and budgets. For those whose stomachs have adjusted to basic local food, the cheapest places to eat are the city's **markets**, where you can get entire meals for less than $1, as well as hearty soups, snacks and large quantities of roast meat. Try Mercado Lanza, just up from Plaza San Francisco, or Mercado Camacho, at the end of Avenida Camacho. **Street food** is another good low-cost option: the ubiquitous *salteñas* and *tucumanes* – delicious pastries filled with meat or chicken with vegetables – make excellent mid-morning snacks, especially if washed down by the freshly squeezed orange and grapefruit juice which is sold from wheeled stalls all over the city.

Few places open for breakfast much before 8am, and Paceños treat lunch as the main meal of the day, eating lightly in the evening. Most restaurants serve set lunch menus known as **almuerzos**, which are generally extremely filling and great value. The city also has an increasingly cosmopolitan range of **upmarket restaurants**, concentrated in the Sopocachi neighbouhood. Though quite expensive for Bolivia, you don't have to spend that much to get a good meal, and the exotic range of cuisines on offer can be very tempting after a few weeks away from the city. We've given phone numbers for places where advance **reservations** are advisable or a delivery service is available.

Cafés

Alexander Coffee Shop Av 16 de Julio 1832 ☎02/2312790. Very fashionable but expensive café chain frequented by designer suit-clad paceños and the odd gringo. It's conveniently located on the Prado, with extremely good coffee and fantastic home-made cakes and cookies, even if their strawberry milkshakes taste artificial for the price and the juices, salads, wraps and sandwiches come listed with a faintly patronizing healthy eating blurb. There are also branches on Potosí 1091 and Av 20 de Octubre 2463, as well as in the Zona Sur (Montenegro 1336) and at the airport.

Angelo Colonial Linares 922–24, just off Sagárnaga ☎02/2360199. Popular Western saloon-style gringo hangout "where encounters make the impossible possible", set around a rickety colonial courtyard and crammed with dusty antiques, masks, furniture and musical instruments. Serves reasonable sandwiches and drinks, and good coffee as well as some more substantial meals – the menu's especially big on pasta. Also offers tourist information, a book exchange and plenty of Internet terminals.

Arábica Av 20 de Octubre 2355 ☎02/2113293. Engaging coffee-style bar/bistro converted from a house, and still retaining a front-room feel. While the breakfast menu could do with beefing up, the coffee itself is lavishly presented, and it's also one of the few places in the city that has – admittedly pricey – Spanish tapas like tortilla and goat's cheese bocaditos.

Café Blueberries Northeast side of Plaza Avaroa. A leafy courtyard fronted by ornate lampposts and a blackboard lends this place as genteel an ambience as the name suggests. Excellent Sri Lankan tea served alongside the usual coffee menu.

Café Café Campos 296 ☎02/2434725. Formerly the bohemian *Café de Nadie*, it's a more laid-back, arty and very friendly stopoff these days, open until 9pm for coffee, sandwiches, crêpes and the like. Opera and subdued beats are on the stereo and there are occasional art films, documentaries and exhibitions. Mon–Fri only.

Café de La Paz Av Camacho 1202, just beyond the corner with the Prado. An early-decade facelift means this place isn't quite as atmospheric and smoke-filled as it once was, but there's still wood panelling and the august citizenry of La Paz – mostly old men in grey suits – still come to discuss Bolivia's latest political crises. The coffee is usually top drawer, but if your stomach's up to it you might want to chance their renowned *limón especial*, a sickly, gut-curdling combination of milk and lemon.

Ciudad Plaza del Estudiante ☎02/2441827. Lively and long-established café that's open 24hrs and is always busy, even though the coffee and food are hardly the best. They do, however, whip up a mean papaya *licuado* (basically a milkshake), best enjoyed on the upstairs terrace.

Pepe's Pasaje Jimenez 894, just off Linares between Sagárnaga and Santa Cruz ☎02/2450788. Friendly, intimate little café near the heart of the Mercado de Hechicería which specialises in pancakes and also does a hefty, healthy *ensalada* with creamy avocado and rich, ripe tomato.

Royal corner of Av Santa Cruz and Grau ☎02/2335932. Bright, sunny corner café that's a great place to watch the world go by, with excellent espresso and cappuccino and spicy *salteñas*.

Terraza Av 6 de Agosto and Rosendo Gutierrez. Expensive and very chic café with decent coffee, salads and sandwiches and the most incredible hot chocolate, although their miserly, overpriced breakfasts are a disappointment. There's another branch on Av 16 de Julio.

Zur Molle 89 Mexico 1874 ☎73086863. Bohemian basement café with amiable staff, funky decor and walls lined with Jackson Pollock wannabes. Service can be a bit slow – and the latino punk and ska soundtrack grating – but there's free, rudimentary table footie to amuse you while you wait, as well as a snug-like, sofa-filled room perfect for revolutionary debate. Food- and drink-wise they do decent coffee and crêpes, as well as sandwiches.

Restaurants

The least expensive **restaurants** are no-nonsense places catering to hungry and impecunious workers and students. In these, you'll usually get a filling set *almuerzo* for about $1, while main dishes like steak will cost $2–3; fast food like pizza tends to cost about the same. In mid-range places catering mainly to tourists or wealthier Paceños you'll pay more like $4–5 for an à la carte main course, but many of these places also serve very good set *almuerzos* (often dubbed *almuerzo ejecutivo*) for $3–4 – not bad for five courses. An increasing number of gringo/style bars have also upped the ante with their menus, competing with top-range restaurants serving all kinds of international food, yet even in these you'll rarely need to spend more than $20 per person (the *expensive* tag really is relative in Bolivia) to enjoy a really good meal; great value given the quality of food and service. Most Bolivians eat their main meal of the day between midday and 2pm, with dinner (can be just as substantial) in early evening. In stark contrast to neighbouring Argentina, restaurants begin serving dinner at around 7pm. As a general rule, the more upmarket/gringo-friendly places will open later and fill up later, although it's difficult to find a formal sit-down meal anywhere after 11pm.

Inexpensive

Cevicheria Aquario on Rodriguez, a steep climb up from Calle Mexico. Among the various small, inexpensive restaurants in this area serving *ceviche* – a cold, spicy and delicious Peruvian dish of raw fish or seafood marinated in lime juice, chilli and onions – this is the one Peruvian restaurant students and expats swear by.

Eli's Pizza Express Av 16 de Julio 1800 ☎02/2335566. No-nonsense fast-food outlet with reasonably good pizza and a wide range of inexpensive hot snacks. Decent value, though the neon lighting and plastic decor don't encourage a lengthy stay.

Paladar Fernando Guachalla 359 ☎02/2444929. Veteran Brazilian eaterie which has gone upmarket but still does an incredible value *almuerzo* for around $2. Despite opulent decor and bow-tied waiters, the place retains at least some of its original gregariousness, and manager Javier Escober is a great host. If you're going à la carte, mains like *feijoada* (a Brazilian classic combining black beans and assorted smoked meats and offcuts), *dobradinho* (stomach with chickpeas and chorizo) and surubi cooked in coconut milk are in the $4 bracket, and well worth the price. They also do a mean *caipirinha*, and often have obscure – at least in Bolivia – Brazilian fruits according to season. Also at Av Saavedra 1946 in Miraflores. Closed Mon (Sun in the Miraflores branch).

Sergiu's Av 6 de Agosto 2040. Hole-in-the-wall snack bar serving tasty pizza by the slice, hot dogs and doner kebabs – it's good value and extremely popular with students from the nearby university. Daily 3.30–11pm.

Surucachi Av 16 de Julio 1598. Hugely popular lunchtime escape from the chaos of the Prado, housed in a tiled, gilt-trimmed colonial building almost as impressive as the nearby Museo de Arte Contemporáneo. Waiters are no-nonsense, white shirt/black tie and the unpretentiously Bolivian *almuerzo* – traditional stuff like *pique macho* (spicy beef) and fried *pejerrey* – is great value at just over a dollar.

Yusseff Sagárnaga 380, on the first floor of a shopping arcade ☎71934121. Difficult to locate, bare boarded and rather surreal, this excellent Lebanese restaurant serves delicious tapas-like portions of falafel, hummous, tabouleh and other Middle Eastern classics for around a dollar each. The hookahs are of the PC variety, the retro Arabic sounds are fantastic and they even have pastries – including authentic baklava – to go with the mint tea.

Moderate

100% Natural Sagárnaga 345. Largely vegetarian health-food restaurant popular with backpackers, serving a good range of breakfasts, salads and fruit juices, plus main courses like trout and soya steaks.

Andrómeda Av Arce 216 ☎02/2440726. Under new French ownership since mid-2006, this is a classy little place popular with both local office workers and clued-up expats. They come for the excellent – usually with a neo-vegetarian bent – four-course, $3.50 set *almuerzo*, typically including lentil soup, grilled fish and fettucini with pesto. Dinner, strangely enough, is slightly cheaper, with a two-course, savoury/sweet crêpe combination and glass of cider coming in at just over $3. Sweet tooths should also check out the selection of scrumptious homemade cakes. Closed Sat afternoon (open from 7pm–midnight) and Sun.

Armonía Av Ecuador 2284, Sopocachi ☎02/2418458. Quirky, unpretentious little veggie buffet ($2.63) where – more than anywhere else in La Paz – it feels like you're stepping into someone's home. The mousey proprietress keeps a hawk-like watch on the plates of beans, corn, cauliflower fritters, salad and the like, making sure you don't have to hang around too long before a steaming new platter arrives. Lunch only. Closed Sun.

La Bodeguita Cubana Av Federico Zuazo 1665 ☎02/2310363. Lively Cuban restaurant with a graffiti-covered interior loosely modelled on one of Ernest Hemingway's favourite haunts in Havana. A kitschy collage of old easy-listening album sleeves takes up a whole wall, while – with their framed (and famed, though you'll need to put in a bulk order to get your hands on one) "Che, Fidel, Chavez, Evo" T-shirt – it's not too difficult to see where their political sympathies lie. There are plenty of Cuban staples like fried yucca, *ropa vieja* and cow tongue in tomato sauce, although their *mojitos* are a bit limp. Closed Sun.

La Casa de los Paceños Av Sucre 856 ☎02/2280955. A block from the museums on Calle Jaen. Sepia-styled after a colonial drawing room, with sober oil paintings, chandeliers and faux-gas lamps, this welcoming mid-range-verging-on-the-upmarket option is a great place to sample traditional La Paz dishes like *sajta* (a spicy chicken stew), *chairo* (a hearty soup) or *charquekhan* (dried llama meat) as well as creative appetizers like cow heart in peanut sauce. There are also at least a couple of decent veggie options. Closed Sun evening.

Cevicheria Mi Peru Av Saavedra 1983, near the football stadium in Miraflores ☎02/2227578. Small, homely Peruvian restaurant serving excellent seafood dishes including *ceviche* and an exquisite *chupe de mariscos* – a traditional seafood soup.

Layq'a On the first floor above the corner of Linares and Sagárnaga ☎02/2460903. Excellent place to try traditional Altiplano dishes, including llama steaks and *crema de chuño* – a delicious soup made from freeze-dried potatoes. The popular set *almuerzo* – including access to a vegetable, lentil, bean and fruit (not in the same plate, obviously) "Super Salad Bar" – is a challenge to even the biggest appetite, although at $5 it probably should be. Service is unfailingly polite, if sometimes rather dithering, and they usually put on specials and folkloric dancing during January's Alasitas festival.

Le Bistrot Fernando Guachalla 399 ☎02/2421390. Formerly Café Montmartre, this *très* arty Alliance Francaise annex serves decent French food and drink in an animated, candle-lit atmosphere; with its plate-glass front window giving onto rain-lashed cobbles, you could almost imagine you're in Europe. Alongside Gallic specialities like crêpes and omelettes, the moneyed clientele lap up Franco-Bolivian hybrids like carpaccio of llama with herbs. Closed Sat night & Sun.

El Lobo Av Illampu with Santa Cruz. The most popular hangout for Israelis in La Paz (the menu is in Hebrew and Spanish), with decent vegetarian and Middle Eastern dishes as well as burgers, sandwiches, salads, pasta and pizza, all served with reliable surliness amid fantastical/cod-philosophical graffiti art and photo montages of Israelis in action.

Manantial inside the *Hotel Gloria* at Potosí 909 ☎02/2407070. At around $2.50, the formidable set *almuerzo* offers some of the best vegetarian food in La Paz, with four excellent courses including a salad bar. Closed Sun.

Oliver's Travels Corner of Murillo and Tarija. A self proclaimed "100% fake English pub". There's nothing fake about their veggie curries (save perhaps the fact that they're cooked by a *chola* rather than a Subcontinental Indian), though, heavenly ginger and tomato concoctions which taste authentic, and as good as most of the stuff you'll find in Britain. All in all, probably the most welcome culinary surprise in Bolivia. They're made using local *and* imported spices, and it shows; the meat equivalent isn't quite as superlative but still worth making the hike up there for. They also do steaks, fish & chips and English breakfasts, with PG Tips teabags no less.

Pot Colonial Linares 906, upstairs from Museo de la Coca ☎71589117. Decent vegetarian food in a rarefied hideaway styled in what's probably best described as Inca tree-house chic. While the various aubergine permutations and cheese-filled yucca fritters tend to the heavy side, the trellised surroundings and acoustic music lighten things up. For a grander eating experience, the adjoining dining room is filled with carved furniture under a vaulted brick ceiling.

Tambo Colonial Inside *Hotel Rosario*, Av Ilampu 704 ☎02/2451658. Famous for both its extravagant breakfast buffet (open to non-guests 7.30–10.30am, $2.50) and its tender Titicaca trout in various permutations. More traditional indigenous fare is served at weekends to go with the live music.

Expensive

Casa Nostra Av Ballivián 927, Zona Sur ☎02/2792417. This stylish yet self-effacing trattoria prepares some of the most flavour-rich Italian cuisine in La Paz, more than justifying the trek from uptown. Mains – including a fiery, well-oiled *penne arrabiata* and a buttery-rich pesto – are worth every cent of their $5 price tag, while their *Jugo de Cosa Nostra*, a combination of fresh strawberry, lemon and pineapple, is even more mouth-watering than it sounds, especially if the Zona Sur sun is shining. Service is impeccable and there's also rich Tarijan wine by the glass.

Chalet La Suisse Av Muños Reyes 1710, Calacoto, Zona Sur ☎02/2793160. Upmarket Swiss-owned restaurant conforming to prettified stereotype, at least in design. With a reputation garnered over almost a quarter of a century, the food is expensive (although most dishes come in well under $10) if reliably fresh, with continental favourites such as garlic mushrooms and snails in herb butter, as well as paella and – just to keep hip to the competition – Asian dishes like sushi and duck teriyaki. The wine list offers a fair selection of European vintages, including several different Marqués de Cáceres Riojas for around $20 a pop.

Churrasqueria El Gaucho Av 20 de Octubre 2041, near the corner with Aspiazu ☎02/2310440. First-class Argentine steak house with attentive service, good wine and excellent meat dishes – it's decorated with football memorabilia, dangling wine boxes and quotations from Argentina's greatest. Closed Sun evening.

La Comédie Pasaje Medinacelli 2234 ☎02/2423561, Ⓦwww.lacomedie-lapaz.com. Sacre Bleu! A cellar of real, honest-to-goodness French wine and genuine *haute cuisine* in a ship-shaped building complete with porthole windows and art-lined walls. The extravagant menu is big on duck – potted, pâté-d and roasted – and there's also a fair-sized seafood list serving up the likes of fish mousse and mustard salmon with honey and capers. Veggies aren't completely neglected, although, at a mere two dishes, options are scant. Evenings only Sat and Sun.

Maphrao On Hermanos Manchego 2586 ⓣ02/2434682. Previously located down in San Miguel, Zona Sur, this modern, inviting Asian restaurant's move to Sopocachi makes it perfect for a pre-pubbing/clubbing meal. Located on the ground floor of an incongruously impressive building near *Mongo's* (see p.108), with bamboo furniture, warm service and nice, jazzy deep house on the hi-fi, it's a difficult place to drag yourself away from. With the menu running the gamut of South East Asian cuisine (including Chinese and Indonesian), you can savour the novelty of having an astringent Indian samosa starter and a creamy red Thai curry main. Portions are substantial, so make sure there's enough space in your stomach before splashing out. The city's best-stocked juice bar is promised for 2007.

Pronto Jáuregui 2248 just off Fernando Guachalla ⓣ02/2441369. Elegant yet friendly and non-intimidating Italian restaurant frequented by gringos lapping up the kind of gourmet nosh they'd be paying top whack for back home. The Salvador Dalí theme is perhaps a little incongruous but the dedication to Mediterranean cooking with an unlikely Andean twist is unquestionable. Evenings only. Closed Sun.

Vienna Federico Zuazo 1905 ⓣ02/2441660, ⓦwww.restaurantvienna.com. Probably the best restaurant in La Paz, with exquisite Central European cuisine, imperious decor and immaculate service supplied by a squadron of manicured waiters and trained largely on politicians, journalists and other besuited members of La Paz's chattering classes. Nevertheless, it's still surprisingly good value, with main courses like *wienerschnitzel*, *gulash* and *sauerkraut* from as little as $4. There's also a serious list of pasta dishes, as well as Bolivian *chairo* on Sundays. If you're planning on using your plastic, note that they only accept Amex. Closed Sat.

Wagamama Pasaje Pinilla 2557, just off Av Arce ⓣ02/2434911. Not part of the trendy, London-based Wagamama chain but an upmarket and authentic Japanese restaurant in its own right, patronized by Asian businessmen. While the decor's a little tired, the varied menu includes sublime sushi and sashimi, and great tempura. Closed Sun.

Drinking and nightlife

La Paz is generally fairly quiet on weekday evenings, but explodes into life on **Friday** nights – known as *viernes de solteros* (bachelor Fridays) – when much of the city's male population goes out drinking. Saturday nights are not quite so frenetic, but still pretty lively. In the city centre – and above all in the market district along Max Paredes and Avenida Buenos Aires – there are countless rough-and-ready **whiskerías** and **karaoke bars** where hard-drinking, almost exclusively male crowds gather to drown their sorrows in beer and *chufflay*, a lethal mix of Singani and lemonade, while playing *cacho*, a popular dice game, or singing along to the latest Latin pop songs. Going out to these popular bars is certainly a very authentic Bolivian experience and can be great fun, but as a foreigner you should expect to attract a good deal of attention and be prepared to drink until you drop – refusing an invitation from a fellow drinker is considered rather rude. For women, such places are best avoided altogether.

With one or two exceptions, the more upmarket nightspots – where as a foreigner you'll probably feel more at home – are concentrated in the middle-class suburb of **Sopocachi**, particularly on and around Avenida 20 de Octubre. Here you'll find a good variety of **bars**, many of which have live music and dancing at the weekends. Although opening hours were recently extended to 4am, La Paz's **club** scene is currently pretty dire, with several long-running institutions having closed in the last few years. More than ever, generic Latin American pop, salsa and cumbia tend to predominate, although you'll also find jazz, Brazilian, house and rock music if you look hard enough. The single-page pamphlet *El Semáforo* is about all that's available in the way of nightlife listings, with more or less the same places listed each week; you can pick one up in the trendier bars and restaurants. You may have to pay a **cover charge** for live music and at weekends, though this will never be more than a few dollars.

Bars and nightclubs

Diesel Av 20 de Octubre 2271, between Rosendo Gutiérrez and Fernando Guachalla. Post-apocalyptic style bar, akin to a sanitised Berlin art installation. Aircraft engines dangle from the ceiling, a futuristic log brazier burns away in the centre and the drinks menu lists concoctions like Anthrax and Petro-diesel. Not that the post-industrial sterility is reflected in the staff; service couldn't be friendlier and the free spicy potatoes have to be the most delicious bar fodder in Bolivia. One word of caution: after a few drinks, the sci-fi toilets may present a gender identification problem.

Green Bar Av Salinas, just up from Plaza Avaroa. Dive-bar style drinking den accessed through a warehouse-like sliding door. Attracts an unpretentious blend of gringos and Paceños with its intimate atmosphere, classic rock-postered walls (look out for the priceless Phil Collins shot from the early 1980s) and cold draught beer. One of several small bars in this part of Sopocachi. Closed Sun.

Irish Bar Plaza Avaroa. The name doesn't exactly leave much to chance, but with Uruguayan management and a wholly non-Irish staff you'll have to exhaust all your creative faculties to imagine you're in the mother country. That said, they do have bottled Guinness (no draught, alas) and a map of Dublin pubs on the wall, just so you know where the real thing actually is. The candle-lit, wooden-rafter attic ambience is also pretty pleasant, very conducive to working your way through their selection of foreign beer. And food-wise, they at least attempt Colcannon and an Irish breakfast (suspiciously akin to the English variety).

The Lounge Presbítero Medina 2527. Offbeat, intimate little café bar accessed by a candle-lit porch. Don't be put off if it feels like you're breaking into someone's house – boldly enter by the unmarked door and join a bohemian local/expat crowd digging documentaries, art exhibitions and a connoisseur's choice of live music and DJs until midnight. Closed Sun.

La Luna Whiskeria-Pub Oruro with Murillo. Atmospheric, torn and frayed late-night drinking cave with Supertramp (Bolivians seem to have a genetic predisposition to *Breakfast In America*) on the stereo and seediness in the air, conveniently close to the main budget accommodation area.

Mama Diablo Av 6 de Agosto, opposite Calle Pinilla. La Paz's Latin music epicentre, with a slicked-back, sharp-dressed local crowd, and live salsa and cumbia every weekend.

Mongo's Rock-Bottom Café Hermanos Manchego 2444. The granddaddy of La Paz's gringo hangouts, with televised sports and decent food giving way to serious drinking, loud music (live Sun–Tues) and raucous dancing as the evening wears on. Still hugely popular with Bolivians, travellers and expats alike, yet sometimes prone to annoying conceits like reserving almost every table in the bar.

Oliver Travel's Corner of Murillo and Tarija. Staff are a somewhat schizoid mixture of the disarmingly pleasant and the objectionable, but this is a lively enough place to lie back and think of England, or at least watch their Premiership football. Its secret weapon is curry, and fans of Madchester vintage indie sounds will find plenty to shake their funky tambourine to, but perhaps it's better to leave the last word to their flyer proviso: "If easily offended then please visit as we like insulting boring people the most".

Ram Jam Presbitero Medina 2421, up and round the corner from *Green Bar*. Roomy joint with chunky, candlelit wooden tables and a petite yet busy dance floor, run by some of the same people who helped launch *Mongo's*. The clientele is largely local, the nutty Saya beer straight from the *Adventure Brew Hostal* (see p.85) and the – often live – music policy nothing if not eclectic, running the gamut from deep house to classic cheesy disco to Latino pop and salsa. If you're feeling a little bloodless, there's also an oxygen bar upstairs (the world's highest), advertised with the waggish revelation, "You've been an addict all your life – but you didn't know it".

Sol y Luna Cochabamba with Murillo. Dutch-owned institution serving strong coffee and cold beer (including a couple of microbrewed varieties from Sucre) in a mellow, stone-walled, candlelit atmosphere. Since 2005, they've also been serving food, with a cosmopolitan menu listing meaty Dutch soups, French brochettes and Russian Stroganov as well as chicken dishes from Thailand, Indonesia and even one-time Dutch colony Surinam. It's conveniently close to the main accommodation area and is a good place to meet other travellers, although even with the recent extension you'll have to arrive early to have much chance of getting a seat. Music-wise, the endless shelves of CDs are bolstered with regular live Afro-Cuban and Latin jazz, as well as open-mic sessions.

Thelonious Jazz Bar Av 20 de Octubre 2172. Authentic jazz venue with an intimate basement atmosphere, hosting excellent live jazz and Brazilian music Wed–Sat. The $2.50 cover charge is tacked onto the end of your drinks bill rather than paid upfront, but is usually worth every centavo. Closed Sun and Mon.

Traffic Av Arce 2549. Flashy bar-cum restaurant cum-club, with a chandelier-lit, brick-arched dining area and minimalist cuisine including beer-battered lobster and champagne-flambéed pork. Big-name national DJs keep the laser-guided dance floor heaving into the wee hours with electro, house and hip-hop.

The arts and entertainment

Appreciation of the **performing arts** in La Paz is limited to a small minority, but there are a few places where you can catch theatre, classical music concerts, ballet and even opera. The **cinema** is more popular, though audiences have declined with the proliferation of backstreet video shows and the rise of DVD. The emphasis tends to be on Hollywood action blockbusters, almost always in English with Spanish subtitles; about the only exception to this is the Cine Municipal 6 de Agosto. A decent site for **entertainment listings** is ⓦwww.utopos.org, although it's not always up to date. You can pick up *Agenda Cultural*, a free, pocket-sized monthly guide to public museums, galleries and theatre, available at the more upmarket/bohemian cafés/bars and especially useful for checking out what's on at Cine Municipal 6 de Agosto (see below). For a pdf version, and more info on cultural happenings, festivals and the like, check out ⓦwww.lapaz.bo/culturas.

For more traditional entertainment you should head to one of the folk music venues known as **peñas**, where you'll see Andean folk dancing accompanied by traditional Andean music involving drums, *charangos*, guitars, *quenas* (notched flutes) and the inevitable *zampoñas* (panpipes). Though primarily aimed at tourists, *peñas* are also very popular with Bolivians and feature some of the best and most authentic folk dancing and music groups in the country. Most *peñas* also serve hearty traditional meals.

Theatres and cinemas

Casa Municipal de Cultura Franz Tamayo Av Mariscal Santa Cruz, opposite Plaza San Francisco ⓣ02/2406877. Hosts a wide range of cultural events including theatre, folk music, art exhibitions and film screenings, and also has a café-bar popular with La Paz's intellectual types.

Cine 16 de Julio Av 16 de Julio 1897 just off Plaza del Estudiante ⓣ02/2441099. Comfortable upmarket cinema showing the latest international releases.

Cine Monje Campero Av 16 de Junio 1495 ⓣ02/2333332. Along with Cine 16 de Julio, the most modern cinema in the city, showing the latest Hollywood blockbusters.

Cine Municipal 6 de Agosto Av 6 de Agosto 2284. ⓣ02/2442629. Impressive-municipally run cinema housed in a visually arresting Art Deco building and dedicated to national, Latin American and European film, often with a cultural/political/arthouse bent and usually programmed by season.

Teatro Municipal Alberto Saavedra Pérez Genaro Sanjines con Indaburo ⓣ02/2406183. Elegant Neoclassical building that is now the city's premier venue for theatre, classical music, opera and ballet.

Peñas

La Casa Del Corregidor Murillo 1040 ⓣ02/2363633. A lovely cobbled courtyard and rustic colonial interior – all red-checked tablecloths and cast-iron chandeliers – makes this the most elegant folk music environment in the capital. At $10, the food-inclusive cover charge represents great value. Shows start at 8.30pm. Closed Sun.

Peña Huari Sagárnaga 339 ⓣ02/2316225. The longest-established and most popular *peña* in town – hence the $10.25 cover charge – with a reasonably authentic folk music show and good, if pricey, traditional Altiplano food, including a list of llama dishes well into double figures. Shows start around 8pm.

Peña Markatambo Jaen 710 ⓣ02/2280041. Perhaps the most authentic traditional music and dance show in La Paz, with an ideal setting in an old colonial mansion, though the food is mediocre. $4.25 cover charge; shows (Thurs–Sat only) start at 10pm.

Peña Parnaso Sagárnaga 189 ☎ 02/2316827. Another very touristy and similarly priced *peña*, slap-bang in the middle of gringo alley. The food isn't bad, and reasonably compelling shows kick off at 8.30pm amid colonial cornicing, columns and a particularly tacky backdrop. There is a $10 cover charge, although you can sometimes pick up flyers offering a free drink.

Shopping

Given that the city can at times feel like one massive marketplace, it should come as no surprise that La Paz is a good place to go **shopping**. You'll find a wider range of **artesanía** (handicrafts) here than anywhere else in Bolivia, with goods from all over the country, which means you don't have to lug a sackful of souvenirs back with you from Sucre or Potosí. Most of what's on sale is good quality, too, and prices aren't much higher than at the point of manufacture.

Artesanía

The best place to shop for handicrafts and other souvenirs is on **Calle Sagárnaga** and the surrounding streets, where you'll find dozens of shops and street stalls; there's also a good handicrafts market in the gallery next to the church on Plaza San Francisco. Prices (though not necessarily quality) are generally lower on the street stalls than in the shops. It's worth shopping around and comparing prices before you buy, and there's room for a certain amount of bargaining, but don't expect prices to come down too much. Acting as if you're in an Oriental bazaar won't get you very far, and haggling with someone far poorer than you over a dollar or two will just make you look foolish and mean-spirited.

Amongst the best stuff on offer are the **traditional textiles** from all over the highlands, including beautiful handmade ponchos, woven belts, blankets and women's shawls that can make very nice wall hangings. Be warned, though, that a well-made poncho with an intricate design can cost well over $100. For a more moderately priced and practical souvenir, you can't beat the llama and alpaca wool **jumpers**, **socks** and **hats**. You can pick up a hat for just $1 and a warm sweater for as little as $8 on the street stalls, though you can pay several times that for a finely made and professionally designed one in some of the shops on Sagárnaga. **Leather** items are also pretty good value, especially the hard-wearing and very stylish belts and bags made of leather decorated with strips of traditional weavings. **Silver** jewellery is also abundant and very good value, though the silver content of the stuff sold on the streets isn't always as high as vendors claim it is. There are also several good **musical instrument** shops on Sagárnaga and Linares where you can pick up some beautiful handmade guitars, *charangos* and other stringed instruments, as well as cheaper *quena* flutes and *zampoñas* (panpipes), which make excellent gifts. Many of the different magic charms, bracelets and carved stone figures sold in the Mercado de Hechicería also make inexpensive souvenirs and outlandish gifts for people back home. Most of the **fossils** sold on the street are fake.

Books and maps

Los Amigos del Libro, Mercado 1315 at Colón in the city centre, is by far the best bookshop in La Paz, with a good selection of books in English and Spanish, including many of the various travel guides to Bolivia and other South American countries, some trekking and tourist maps, plenty of glossy coffee-table books, and

▲ Fruit and vegetable vendor at the Mercado Camacho

international magazines like *Time* and *Newsweek*. They have another branch in Zona Sur at Av Montenegro 1410, San Miguel, while the area near the university at the bottom end of the Prado is home to several other bookshops selling books (Spanish only) as well as stalls on the street selling bootleg copies of novels by Latin America's best-known authors. You can buy 1:50,000 and 1:250,000-scale topographical **maps** (as well as photocopies of ones which aren't available) of most of Bolivia (some areas are yet to be surveyed) from the Instituto Geográfico Militar (IGM ⓣ02/2220513; Mon–Thurs 9am–noon & 2.45–6pm & Fri 9am–noon), which is in the military headquarters (Estado Mayor) on Avenida Saavedra in Miraflores; you'll need your passport for identification.

Food

If you want to buy **food** to prepare yourself, you'll find pretty much everything you need at La Paz's food markets. **Mercado Lanza**, just north of Plaza San Francisco, and **Mercado Camacho**, at the end of Avenida Camacho, sell a wide range of fresh fruit, vegetables, tinned and dried goods; Lanza also sells all kinds of imported wines and spirits, often for less than they cost in their countries of origin. **Mercado Sopocachi**, on Guachalla with Ecuador in Sopocachi, sells much the same range of stuff, with a wider selection of imported goods, though as you would expect of a wealthier suburb, things are a bit more expensive here. Less good for fresh food but better for dry stuff and luxury imports are the growing number of US-style **supermarkets** in Sopocachi: try Ketal on Avenida Arce just south of Plaza Isabella La Católica, or ZATT, on Sanchez Lima with Salinas.

Listings

Airlines For flights with the military airline TAM, it's easiest to book through a travel agent. Aerocon, Av Arce 2549 ⓣ02/2150093; Aerolineas Argentinas, Av 16 de Julio, Edificio Petrolero, 1st floor ⓣ02/2351624, ⓦwww.aerolineas.com.ar; AeroMexico, Mercado 1328, Edificio Mariscal Ballivián, 12th floor ⓣ02/2202681 or 02/2124475, ⓦwww.aeromexico.com; AeroSur, Av 16 de Julio

1616 ⓣ02/2313233, ⓦwww.aerosur.com; Amaszonas, Av Saavedra 1649, Miraflores ⓣ02/2220848, ⓦwww.amaszonas.com; American Airlines, Plaza Venezuela 1440, Edificio Hernan ⓣ02/2351360, ⓦwww.aa.com; Iberia, Ayacucho 378, Edificio Credinform, 5th floor ⓣ02/2203869, ⓦwww.iberia.com; KLM, Galería Futuro, Montenegro 778, San Miguel ⓣ02/2774212, ⓦwww.klm.com; LAN Chile, Av 16 de Julio, Edificio 16 de Julio, El Prado 1566 ⓣ02/2358377, ⓦwww.lanchile.com; Lufthansa, Av 6 de Agosto 2512, Edificio Illimani II ⓣ02/2431717, ⓦwww.lufthansa.com; Taca, Av 16 de Julio 1616, Edificio Petrolero ⓣ02/2774400, ⓦwww.taca.com; Transporte Aero Militar (TAM), Av Montes 738 ⓣ02/2121582 or 2121585; Varig, Av Mariscal Santa Cruz 1392, Edificio Cámara de Comercio ⓣ02/2314040, ⓦwww.varig.com.br.

Airport Information ⓣ02/2810122 for flight enquiries, ⓣ02/2841884 for the military airport.

American Express The Amex representative is Magri Turismo, Capitán Ravelo 2101 (see p.115), though they don't change Amex – or indeed any – traveller's cheques.

Banks and exchange There are plenty of banks with ATMs in the centre of town, especially on Av Camacho, and a growing number of freestanding ATMs, including one next to the main Entel office on El Prado. If you lose your card, you can cancel Visa and Mastercard on ⓣ02/2314410. The best places to change cash and traveller's cheques are the many cambios on Av Camacho, the Prado and elsewhere in the city centre; try Money Exchange International, Mercado 990 (Mon–Fri 8am–12.30pm & 2–7.30pm), or Unitours Casa de Cambios, Mercado 1328 (Mon–Fri 9.30am–12.30pm & 2.30–7pm). Street moneychangers congregate on Av Camacho, the Prado and around Plaza del Estudiante. They offer a convenient way to get money at night or at weekends, but it's not a good idea to change large sums and you should check what you get carefully.

Car rental American, Av Camacho 1574 ⓣ02/2202933; Avis, Av Sanchez Lima 2600, Edificio Tango ⓣ02/2111870; Dollar ⓣ02/2430043; Imbex, Av Montes 522 ⓣ02/2316895; Oscar Crespo Maurice, Av Simón Bolívar 1865 ⓣ02/2220989.

Dentist Dr Jorge Daniel Aguirre, Ist Floor, Edificio Illimani II, Av Arce 2677 ⓣ02/2432682.

Doctor Clinica del Sur, Av Hernando Siles 3539, corner of Calle 7, Obrajes, Zona Sur, has a 24hr emergency facility and is used by most embassy staff. Try Clinica Cemes, Av 6 de Agosto 2881, for less serious ailments. A good laboratory for stool tests is Dr Luis Valdivia, 2nd floor, Edifico Alameda, Av 16 de Julio 1655. If you get severe altitude sickness go to the High Altitude Pathology Clinic, Clinica IPPA, Av Saavedra 2302 ⓣ02/2245394, ⓦwww.geocities.com/zubietaippa.

Embassies and consulates Argentina, Aspiazu 497 ⓣ02/2417737; Australia, Av Arce, Edificio Montevideo ⓣ02/2440459; Brazil, Av Arce, Edificio Multicentro ⓣ02/2440202; Canada, Victor Sanjinés, Edificio Barcelona ⓣ02/2415021; Colombia, Calle 9, Calacoto 7835 ⓣ02/2784491; Chile, Av Hernando Siles 5843 ⓣ02/2785275; Ecuador, Av 16 de Julio 1440, Edificio Hermann ⓣ02/2319739; Mexico, Sanchez Bustamante 509, Calacoto ⓣ02/2771824; Paraguay, Edificio Illimani II, Av 6 de Agosto ⓣ02/2433176; Peru, Av 6 de Agosto 2455, Edificio Hilda ⓣ02/2440631; Uruguay, Calle 21, Edificio Monroy Velez, Calacoto ⓣ02/2791465; UK, Av Arce 2732 ⓣ02/2433424; US, Av Arce 2780 ⓣ02/2430251; Venezuela, Av Arce 2678 ⓣ02/2431365.

Emergencies Ambulance ⓣ118, police ⓣ110, tourist police ⓣ02/2225016.

Immigration For visa extensions go to the Oficina de Migración at Av Camacho 1433 ⓣ02/2203028 (Mon–Fri 8.30am–3.45pm). It should be a same-day service, but don't count on it.

Internet access In La Paz an Internet café beckons at every other doorway; most charge about $0.25–0.30 an hour and are pretty much interchangeable. Practically every hotel also has its own Internet access, although it tends to be more expensive (if usually free in upmarket places, with Wi-fi proliferating). Both the small Sol Bendición, Sagárnaga 319, inside the shopping arcade (daily 7.30am–8pm) and Friends Internet, Galería El Pueblito, Linares 880 (daily 8am–9pm), are near most of the backpacker accommodation and are usually fairly quiet and relaxed. Punto Entel, on Av Mariscal Santa Cruz (daily 8am–10pm), is faster and has more computers, but for Internet with a view and a good vibe it's difficult to beat Jiwhaki inside Hotel Rosario, Av Illampu 704 (daily 3–9pm).

Language schools The only accredited school which concentrates solely on Spanish is the Instituto de la Lengua Española, C 14 with Aviador 180, in the Achumani neighbourhood of the Zona Sur ⓣ02/2796074 or 71556735, ⓦwww.spanbol.com. If you're feeling linguistically adventurous, Instituto de Lengua y Cultura Aymara (ILCA), Casilla 2681 ⓣ02/2419650, ⓦwww.ilcanet.com, also offers Aymara and Quechua classes. Alternatively, if you're heading across to Brazil, the Speakeasy Institute, Av Arce 2047 ⓣ02/2441779, ⓦwww.speakeasyinstitute.com, offers Portuguese lessons in addition to practical, activity-centred Spanish learning. Private teachers offering one-to-one Spanish tuition often advertise in hostels; one of the most experienced and best organized is ABC, Linares 980, 2nd floor, apt. 202 ⓣ02/2313721 or 72552871, ⓦwww.studyspanish-lapaz-bolivia.tk.

Laundry Most hotels have a laundry service, and there are plenty of *lavanderías* around town. Try Lavandería Maya, Sagárnaga 339, inside the same gallery as *Hostal Maya Inn*, or the friendly Finesse, Illampu 853.

Outdoor equipment Andean Summits and Bolivian Journeys, both on Sagárnaga, have a good selection of mountain equipment for sale or rental, including tents, camping stoves and boots.

Pharmacies There are plenty of pharmacies all over the city; they take turns to stay open late. There's a 24hr, 365-day-a-year pharmacy on Av 16 de Julio 1473, near the Monje Campero cinema (ⓣ02/2331838).

Photo equipment and film There are photo developing labs all over the city centre and along the Prado; try ABC, Av 16 Mariscal Santa Cruz. Tecnología Fotográfica, Ground Floor Office A, Edificio Renacer, Av 20 de Octubre 2255, develops and digitizes slide and black-and-white film, repairs cameras (including digital) and sells a reasonable range of equipment.

Post office Correo Central, Av Mariscal Santa Cruz with Oruro (Mon–Fri 8am–8pm, Sat 8am–6pm, Sun 9am–noon).

Telephones The main ENTEL office is at Ayacucho 267, just below the corner with Av Illimani (daily 8am–midnight). There are phone booths all over the city which accept cards available from any street stall – the most expensive card costs about $12.50, for which you can make a short international call. Directory enquiries are on ⓣ104.

Tourist police Edificio Olimpia, Plaza Tejada Sorzano, opposite the stadium in Miraflores (open 24hr, ⓣ02/2225016). Come here to report thefts for insurance claims.

Moving on from La Paz

As the de facto capital of Bolivia it's no surprise that La Paz is the country's major transport hub, and many travellers use it as a base to which they return to collect or drop off luggage and equipment and rest up between forays into Bolivia's many different geographical and climatic regions.

Sadly, passenger **trains** no longer operate out of La Paz, but if you are heading down to Uyuni, Tupiza or the Argentine border at Villazon it's faster and more comfortable to get a bus to Oruro and catch a train from there. You can buy train tickets in advance from the Empresa Ferroviaria Andina office, Fernando Guachalla 494, on the corner with Sanchez Lima in Sopocachi (ⓣ02/2416545, ⓦwww.fca.com.bo).

By bus

The main means of moving on from La Paz is by **bus**. Most **long-distance inter-departmental buses** – including those to Oruro, Potosí, Sucre, Cochabamba, Tarija and Santa Cruz – leave from the **Terminal Terrestre** on Plaza Antofagasta, a few blocks north of Plaza San Francisco. This is also the departure point for **international buses** to Chile and Argentina. Though there's usually no need for the busier routes, it's not a bad idea to buy a ticket in advance when travelling long-distance. The terminal's **information office** (daily 7am–11pm; ⓣ02/2285858 or 2286061) has full details of all bus departures from the city, and can usually give you the number of the relevant company so you can reserve a seat over the phone. Departing passengers have to pay $0.25 to use the terminal – tickets are sold from an office ridiculously situated at the back of the station near the toilets. Make sure you leave plenty of time to buy them; each platform exit is closely guarded and you won't be able to pass without presenting your ticket. Buses and micros to the **Lago Titicaca region**, the Peruvian border, Sorata and Charazani leave from several different streets close to the **cemetery district**, high up on the northwest side of La Paz. You can get here on public transport by catching any micro marked

Tour operators

La Paz is home to a plethora of **tour operators** offering everything from half- or one-day tours in and around the city to expeditions to remote parts of the country lasting several weeks. The standard day-trips offered by almost every company include a **city tour**, usually combined with a visit to either the Valle de la Luna and Muela del Diablo, plus Tiwanaku or Chacaltaya. More popular are the activity-focused outdoor adventure tours, particularly one-day **mountain biking** trips down to Coroico, and longer **mountaineering expeditions** and **treks** in the Cordillera Real. The most popular trekking routes are the Choro, Takesi, Takesi Alto and Yunga Cruz trails (see Chapter 2 for further details). Many travellers choose to do this kind of trip with an agency, as remote wilderness regions are otherwise difficult to reach without the necessary transport, equipment and a guide who knows the area.

In general, smaller agencies whose tours are aimed primarily at backpackers on a budget are concentrated on and around Calle Sagárnaga, while more established and upmarket operators tend to have offices on the Prado or down in Sopocachi. **Prices** vary considerably between different agencies, but depend above all on the number of people on the tour: the more of you there are, the cheaper it gets. With an average-sized group of four to six people, typical prices are about $10–20 per person for a full-day city tour and $25–35 per person per day for climbing or trekking with guides, food, transport and all equipment. Well-established agencies with good reputations who receive most of their bookings from outside Bolivia charge considerably more, but in return generally give a better and more reliable service. When comparing prices, always make sure you know exactly what is included, particularly equipment, food and accommodation. You may also want to check whether you'll get an **English-speaking guide** – most operators can arrange this, though it may cost more. For longer trips, see if you can meet the guide before signing up to the tour. When it comes to climbing, mountain biking and other **dangerous sports**, it's worth spending a bit extra to go with a more professional company, which can guarantee experienced guides and reliable equipment.

Most agencies sell internal **airline tickets** for a small commission, which can save time, particularly when it comes to the military airline, TAM. Whatever their speciality, most will also book pretty much any tour you want to do or pass you on to another company for a small commission if they can't run it themselves. Though at times this can save time, often you'll just end up paying more for the same service with no guarantee that the subcontractor will keep to their side of the bargain, particularly if you're booking a trip that starts a long way from La Paz. Bear in mind that for popular trips like **rainforest and pampas excursions** from Rurrenabaque or tours on the **Salar de Uyuni**, it's easier, cheaper and usually more reliable to book the trip when you get to Rurrenabaque or Uyuni rather than from La Paz.

America Tours ground-floor office 9, Edificio Avenida, Av 16 de Julio 1490 Ⓣ02/2374204, Ⓕ02/2310023, Ⓦwww.america-ecotours.com. Efficient and reliable travel agency: they're the main booking agent for *Chalalán Ecolodge* in Parque Nacional Madidi, and are a good place to book internal flights, as well as trips to the Pampas del Yacuma and the Salar de Uyuni if you want the limited security of booking in advance.

Andean Summits Aranzaes 2974, Sopocachi Ⓣ02/2422106 or 71944722, Ⓕ02/2413273, Ⓦwww.andeansummits.com. Highly professional adventure-tour operator with an excellent reputation that runs mountaineering and trekking expeditions throughout Bolivia, led by experienced English-speaking guides. They also rent and sell outdoor equipment.

Bolivian Journeys Sagárnaga 363 Ⓣ02/2357848 or 71539803, Ⓕ02/2357848, Ⓦwww.bolivianjourneys.org. Award-winning specialist mountaineering agency feted by the climbing press and given glowing grades by the Bolivian Tourism Ministry. Their moderately priced expeditions in the Cordillera Real and elsewhere boast a high guide to client ratio, take the routes less travelled and use high-spec equipment – they claim to be the only company in La Paz to use 4-season tents.

Crillon Tours Av Camacho 1223 Ⓣ02/2337533, Ⓕ02/2116482, Ⓦwww.titicaca.com. Luxury tour agency running hydrofoil cruises on Lago Titicaca. They also own both the exclusive *Inca Utama Hotel and Spa* in Huatajata on the lake shore and their own *Andean Roots Eco-Village* (home to a maritime museum run by the Limachi brothers, the reed-boat builders employed by explorer Thor Heyerdahl), as well as the *Hostal Posada de los Incas* on the Isla del Sol. Be warned that their website boasts a frightful El Condor Pasa rendition.

Downhill Madness Mountain Biking Sagárnaga 339 Ⓣ02/2391810 or 2431252. Veteran mountain-biking agency with a fairly impressive safety record (as in no deaths), and a comprehensive package which includes full-face helmet, buffet lunch and hot showers at the end of your ride. The bikes are hand-made, and groups are organized via ability. They also offer a no-quibble cancellation policy should you have to back out for whatever reason.

Fremen Galería Comercial Local No.13, Edificio Handal, Av Mariscal Santa Cruz Ⓣ02/2407995 or 2408200, Ⓕ02/2408269, Ⓦwww.andes-amazonia.com. La Paz branch of the excellent and highly respected Bolivia-wide agency offering a wide range of excellent tailor-made tours throughout Bolivia, including river trips on the Río Mamoré on their own luxury floating hotel, the *Reina de Enín*.

Gravity Assisted Mountain Biking ground-floor office 9, Edificio Avenida, Av 16 de Julio 1490 Ⓣ02/2313849, Ⓦwww.gravitybolivia.com. The original and best downhill mountain-bike operator, offering daily trips to Coroico or the Zongo Valley with excellent US-made bikes and experienced and enthusiastic English-speaking guides. They also organize more extreme mountain-bike adventures for experienced riders, are a good source of free tourist advice and have a book exchange. They share the same office as America Tours (see opposite).

Huayna Potosí Travel Agency Illampu 626 Ⓣ02/2317324, Ⓕ02/2456717, Ⓦwww.huayna.com. Friendly and experienced agency run by the inimitable – and highly qualified (both medically and climbing-wise) – Dr Hugo Berrios. In addition to organizing climbing and trekking expeditions in the region, he manages the *Refugio Huayna Potosí* mountain lodge at the foot of Mount Huayna Potosí, and also offers ice-climbing courses at beginner, intermediate and advanced level.

Magri Turismo Capitán Ravelo 2101 Ⓣ02/2442727, Ⓕ02/2443060, Ⓦwww.magri-amexpress.com.bo. Highly respected and long-established upmarket agency running the full range of tours throughout Bolivia, from La Paz city tours to trekking in the Andes and excursions in the Amazon rainforest. They also operate their own eco-lodge (*La Estancia*) on the Isla del Sol.

Topas Adventure Travel Bolivia Illampu 707 Ⓣ02/22111082 or 71264089, Ⓦwww.topas.bo. New, embassy-assisted project uniting Danish overland specialist Topas and veteran Bolivian guides Freddy Céspedes and Juan Carlos Cardenas (formerly operating as the well-organized and moderately priced Akhamani Trek). As well as a two-week overland expedition in their specially adapted vehicle (the first in Bolivia), knowledgeable and enthusiastic English-speaking guides specialize in the Cordillera Apolobamba and the Choro, Takesi and Yunga Cruz trails. They also offer city tours and excursions to Tiwanaku, Chacaltaya, Lago Titicaca, Salar de Uyuni and the Amazon. A *hostal* and café are planned.

Transturin Alfredo Ascarrunz 2518, Sopocachi Ⓣ02/2422222, Ⓕ02/2411922, Ⓦwww.transturin.com. Long-established upmarket operator offering luxury catamaran cruises on Lago Titicaca, including a visit to their exclusive Inti Watana cultural complex on the Isla del Sol. Their Mercedes Benz tour buses are equally luxurious, offering some of the most comfortable road travel in the country.

Bus departures from La Paz

Destination	Frequency	Duration
Arica, Chile	2 daily	8hr
Charazani	1–2 daily	10hr
Chulumani	hourly	4hr 30min
Cobija	1 weekly	48hr
Cochabamba	hourly	7–8hr
Copacabana	every 30min	3hr 30min
Coroico	every 30min	4hr 30min
Desaguadero	every 30min	1hr 30min
Guayaramerín	1–2 daily	32hr
Oruro	every 30min	3hr 30min
Pelechuco	4 weekly	13hr
Potosí	4–6 daily	11hr
Riberalta	1 daily	30–40hr
Rurrenabaque	1 daily	20hr
San Borja	1 daily	20hr
Santa Cruz	15–20 daily	16–18hr
Sorata	hourly	4hr 30min
Sucre	4–5 daily	15hr
Tarija	2–3 daily	24hr
Tiwanaku	every 30min	1hr

"Cementario" running up Calle Santa Cruz from Plaza San Francisco. Buses and micros to **Copacabana** leave from several different offices on Calle Aliaga, just off Avenida Baptista opposite the cemetery itself. If you want to **continue into Peru**, it's very easy to do so from Copacabana, where there are frequent cross-border micros; you can also book a more expensive tourist micro direct to Puno in Peru through any tour agency in La Paz.

Buses and micros to **Tiwanaku** and the Peruvian border at **Desaguadero** leave from offices stretched out along Calle Eyzaguirre between Calle Aliaga and Calle Asin in the cemetery district. Buses to **Sorata** depart from offices a block further east on Calle Bustillos, and those to both **Charazani** and **Pelechuco** in the **Cordillera Apolobamba** leave from Calle Reyes Cardona, another block further along.

Buses and micros to the **Yungas** and on into the Amazon lowlands of the **Beni** leave from the **Villa Fátima** district in the far northeast of the city, which you can reach either by picking up any micro marked "Villa Fátima" heading east along J. J. Perez or south on Avenida 6 de Agosto. Buses and micros for **Coroico** leave from Calle Yanacachi, just off Avenida de las Américas, Villa Fátima's main thoroughfare; Flota Yungueña has the best reputation. Those going to **Chulumani** leave from offices a block further up the same street and around the corner on Calle San Borja. Buses to **Rurrenabaque**, **Riberalta**, **Guayaramerín** and elsewhere in the Beni and on to **Cobija** in the Pando depart from the offices of several different companies further along Avenida de las Américas and just off it to the left on Calle Virgen del Carmen. For long-haul routes to the Beni and Pando, it's well worth coming up here and buying a ticket in advance.

By plane

Given the great distances involved and the generally poor condition of the country's roads, the best way to move on from La Paz is by plane – indeed, during the wet

Domestic flights from La Paz

Destination	Frequency	Duration	Airline
Cobija	1–2 daily	1hr 40min	AC/AM/AS/TAM
Cochabamba	3 daily	45min	AS/TAM
Guayaramerín	1–2 daily	1hr	AC/AM/TAM
Puerto Suarez	7 weekly	2hr	AM/AS
Riberalta	1–2 daily	1hr	AC/AM/TAM
Rurrenabaque	1–2 daily	40min	AM/TAM
Santa Cruz	6–8 daily	1hr 30min	AS/TAM
Sucre	2–3 daily	1hr	AS/TAM
Tarija	3 daily	1hr 20min	AS/TAM
Trinidad	1–3 daily	1hr	AC/AM/TAM
Yacuiba	1–2 weekly	1hr 30min	TAM

season this is sometimes the only way to reach certain destinations. With financial problems looking to have put the lid on **Lloyd Aereo Boliviano**, **AeroSur** (ⓣ02/2313233, ⓦwww.aerosur.com) is now the main domestic operator, with frequent flights from La Paz to all Bolivia's main cities. Relative newcomers **Amaszonas** (ⓣ02/2220848) and **Aerocon** (ⓣ02/2150093, ⓦwww.aerocon.info) operate an increasing number of flights to provincial lowland destinations, as does military airline **TAM** (ⓣ02/2121582 or 2121585). You can buy tickets from all these airlines from their own offices or, for a small commission, through any of the travel agents in La Paz. Phone ⓣ02/2810122 for flight enquiries (ⓣ02/2841884 for the military airport). See the box above for a rundown of schedules.

Around La Paz

There are some must-see attractions within a few hours of La Paz, most notably the mysterious ruined city of **Tiwanaku**, Bolivia's most impressive archeological site. In addition, the spectacular high Andean scenery of the Cordillera Real can be easily reached on a day-trip to **Chacaltaya**, the highest developed ski slope in the world at over 5000m above sea level. Just south of the city the barren, moon-like landscape of the **Valle de la Luna** and the **Muela del Diablo** make a good day out if you want a little taste of the kind of dramatic mountain scenery that awaits you elsewhere in Bolivia.

La Paz to Tiwanaku

The road across the Altiplano to Tiwanaku from La Paz is well paved as part of a new strategic route linking Bolivia with the port of Ilo on the Pacific coast of Peru. About 35km out of El Alto it passes through the village of **LAJA**, where Alonso de Mendoza carried out the inauguration ceremony for the city of La Paz in 1548, a few days before the actual founding of the city in the Choqueyapu valley. The church here was one of the first established in the Altiplano, and has an attractive mestizo-Baroque facade remodelled in 1680 with carvings of monkeys and the double-headed eagle of the Habsburg emperors. Shortly after Laja the road rises to a summit from where there are spectacular views of the entire chain of the Cordillera Real.

The archeological site of Tiwanaku lies 40km or so further on, flanked by the small market **town of Tiwanaku** (about ten minutes' walk west of the ruins). Buses going to the town pass by the ruins first, so you don't need to stop here on your way – just ask the bus driver to drop you off at the entrance to the site (ask for "*las ruinas*"). The town is the easiest place to get a bus back to La Paz, though, and is worth visiting for a look at the colonial **church**, built in the sixteenth century with stones taken from the ruins. Two Tiwanaku idols stand incongruously on either side of the entrance, and the facade is carved with dancing monkeys and topped by puma-faced gargoyles. The Aymara residents of the town and surrounding communities consider themselves the direct descendants of the builders of Tiwanaku, and have been known to occupy the site when they feel they are not getting a sufficient share of the ticket revenue.

Tiwanaku

Set on the Altiplano 71km west of La Paz, the ancient ruined city of **TIWANAKU** (also spelt **Tiahuanaco**) is one of the most monumental and intriguing archeological sites in South America. Founded some three millennia ago, Tiwanaku became the capital of a massive empire that lasted almost a thousand years, developing into a sophisticated urban-ceremonial complex that at its peak was home to some 50,000 people. The city was in many ways the cradle of Andean civilization, making an enormous cultural impact throughout the region and providing the fundamental inspiration for the better-known Inca empire. And though the society that built it disappeared many centuries before the first Europeans arrived in the Andes, Tiwanaku remains a place of exceptional symbolic meaning for the Aymara of the Altiplano, who still come here to make ceremonial offerings to the *achachilas* – the gods of the mountains. The most spectacular of these takes place on the winter solstice in June, when hundreds of *yatiris* (traditional priests) from all over the region congregate to watch the sun rise and celebrate the **Aymara New Year** with music, dancing, elaborate rituals and copious quantities of coca and alcohol.

Some history

Tiwanaku was first established around 1000 BC, with an economy based on potato cultivation and llama herding. By 100 BC it had become an important urban centre, and an organized state with distinct classes of priests, warriors, artisans and aristocrats is thought to have emerged. By 400 AD this state controlled the whole Titicaca basin – an area of some 57,000 square kilometres extending out from the lake between Bolivia's Cordillera Real and Peru and Chile's Cordillera Occidental – and had begun extending its influence, while from around 700 AD Tiwanaku expanded rapidly to dominate an area comprising much of modern Bolivia, southern Peru, northeast Argentina and much of northern Chile itself.

The key to this expansion was a remarkable agricultural system of raised fields, known as **sukakullo**, which revolutionized food production along the shores of Lago Titicaca (see box opposite). Using this system, the plain surrounding the ruins – which today provides a marginal living for just over 7000 campesinos – was 1500 years ago producing harvests big enough to feed over 100,000 people. The same intensive system was implemented in valleys all around the lake, creating a huge food surplus which offered security against poor harvests and freed vast amounts of labour for the construction of monumental temples and palaces. It also allowed trade with other societies and provided food for conquering armies.

Some experts think that the influence of Tiwanaku's **culture** spread as a result of trade and religious influence; others believe it was the result of military conquest. The truth probably lies somewhere in between. Like all Andean societies, Tiwanaku needed access to products from different ecological zones: potatoes and llamas from the Altiplano, maize and peppers from the temperate valleys, coca and hardwoods from the tropical lowlands. As their power grew, direct control of other regions through conquest or colonization probably came to replace trade with neighbouring kingdoms. What's certain is that Tiwanaku's influence spread to encompass a vast area, which was crisscrossed with paved roads along which caravans of hundreds of llamas carried all kinds of produce to the centre of the empire.

Some time after 1000 AD, Tiwanaku fell into a rapid and irreversible **decline**. The fields were abandoned, the population dispersed and, within a period of about fifty years, the empire disappeared. Several theories have been put forward to explain this sudden collapse, including a cataclysmic earthquake or foreign invasion, though the most likely cause of Tiwanaku's downfall was climatic change: scientists studying ice cores from Andean glaciers have discovered that from about 1000 AD the region suffered a long-term decline in rainfall. Though

Sukakullos

The most impressive achievement of the Tiwanaku civilization was undoubtedly the intensification of agriculture along the shores of Lago Titicaca using a system of raised fields known in Aymara as **sukakullo**. This system enabled the inhabitants of Tiwanaku to overcome the problems of drought, floods, frost and soil exhaustion in the Altiplano, converting what is today a harsh and semi-barren region scarcely suitable for agriculture into a vast breadbasket which was able, it's estimated, to produce food for up to six million people. What's unquestionable is the enormous manpower it would have required to build the raised fields, many of which can still be seen around the fringes of the site and at other locations all around Lago Titicaca.

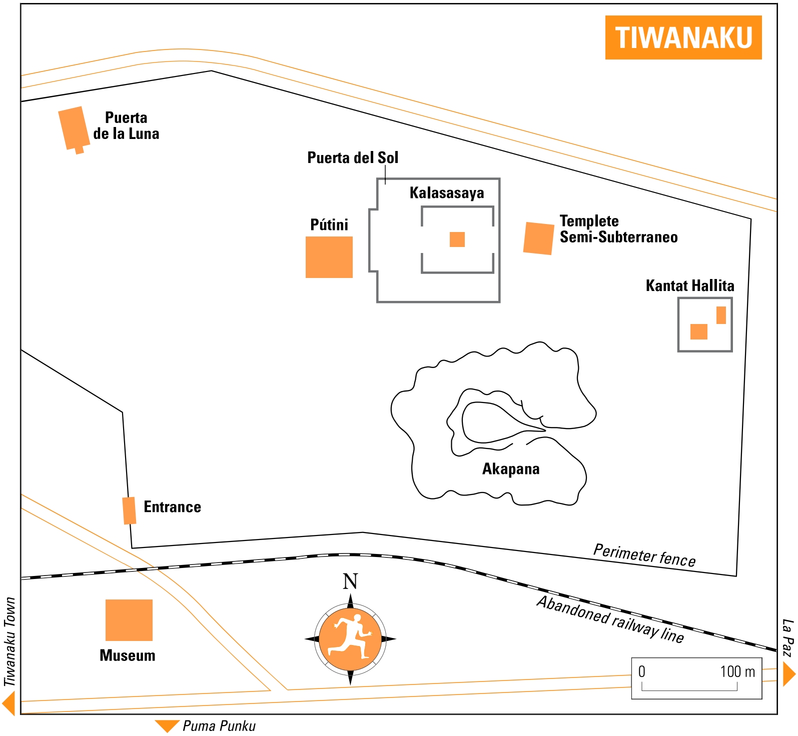
The platforms stand over 1m high, with planting surfaces up to 200m long and 15m wide, and each is carefully structured, with a base of stones followed by a layer of clay to prevent salination by the slightly brackish waters of Lago Titicaca. Above this is a layer of gravel, followed by one of sandy soil and finally a coating of a rich, organic topsoil. The raised fields run in parallel lines, with water-filled ditches running between them, providing irrigation during the dry season and preventing flooding when the level of the lake rose. By storing the heat of the sun during the day and releasing it at night, the water in the ditches also protected crops from frost, extending the growing season considerably. Algae flourished in the warmed water, providing food for fish and ducks, which formed an important part of the Tiwanaku diet. The nutrient-rich sludge of duck excrement, decaying algae and fish remains which accumulated at the bottom of the ditches provided a vital source of organic fertilizer which was periodically scraped up and deposited on the fields to further boost production. Whereas present-day farmers produce about three tons of potatoes per hectare, research suggests that the *sukakullo* produced astonishing yields of up to twenty tonnes a hectare. Experimental projects are now under way to help local campesinos reintroduce these techniques. Rather than expensive modern technology, it seems the ancient knowledge of their ancestors may yet provide the solution to the problems faced by Aymara farmers on the Altiplano.

the imperial storehouses could no doubt withstand a few lean years, this searing drought lasted for decades, even centuries. Unable to feed the hungry masses, Tiwanaku's civilization collapsed.

Most of the **destruction** of the remains of Tiwanaku occurred relatively recently. When the Spanish first came here many of the buildings were still standing, but the presence of gold meant that they quickly set about tearing them down. Licences to loot the site were handed out by the Spanish crown in the same way as for mining, and many of the great stones were dragged away to build churches and houses. Still more were destroyed with dynamite at the beginning of the twentieth century to provide gravel for the foundations of the railway that passes nearby, while early archeological excavations varied little in nature from the looting of the Spaniards, stripping the site of its most beautiful statues to adorn the museums of Europe and the US. Despite the destruction, though, the sheer scale of Tiwanaku and the magnitude of the remaining structures remain deeply impressive, revealing a sophisticated and well-organized society that could call on almost limitless manpower.

The ruins

Though the city of Tiwanaku originally covered several square kilometres, only a fraction of the site has been excavated, and the main **ruins** (daily 9.30am–4pm; $10) occupy a fairly small area which can easily be visited in half a day – the only other major site that has been excavated is Puma Punku


TIWANAKU
Puerta de la Luna
Puerta del Sol
Kalasasaya
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Templete Semi-Subterraneo
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Akapana
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Tiwanaku Town
La Paz
Puma Punku

(see p.124), a pyramid complex a couple of kilometres to the north. A **museum** (see below) by the entrance houses many of the smaller archeological finds. The main ruins cover the area which was once the ceremonial centre of the city, a jumble of tumbled pyramids and ruined palaces and temples made from megalithic stone blocks, many of which weigh over a hundred tonnes. It requires a leap of the imagination to visualize Tiwanaku as it was at its peak: a thriving city of some 50,000 people whose great pyramids and opulent palaces were painted in bright colours and inlaid with gold, surrounded by extensive residential areas built largely from mud brick (of which little now remains) and set amid lush green fields, rather than the harsh, arid landscape you see today.

For all its political and economic power, Tiwanaku's transcendental importance was undoubtedly religious. The first Spanish chroniclers to visit the site were told its name was "Taipicala", the stone at the centre, where it was believed the universe was created and from whence the first humans set forth to colonize the world. The Incas themselves consciously sought to associate themselves with the spiritual legitimacy of Tiwanaku, claiming their own dynasty had also been brought into existence at Lago Titicaca. The US anthropologist Johan Reinhard has sought to explain the spiritual importance of Tiwanaku in terms of **sacred geography**, a system of beliefs related to mountain worship and fertility cults which is still prevalent in the Andes today. The high mountain peaks are considered powerful deities, known as *achachilas* in Aymara, who control meteorological phenomena and the fertility of crops and animals. Lago Titicaca, the biggest body of water in the Andes, also plays a dominant role. In terms of sacred geography, Tiwanaku's position could not be more propitious, set close to the lake with a view east to Illimani, the most important mountain god in the Altiplano, and aligned with Illampu and Sajama, the second and third most important peaks. Though it can't be proved, it seems likely that the builders of Tiwanaku chose the site with these concepts in mind, even though it meant they had to transport stones weighing hundreds of tonnes from across the lake.

The museum

The best place to start your visit is at the modest **museum** (daily 9.30am–4pm; admission free with entrance to site) beside the entrance where tickets are sold. Though much of what archeologists have uncovered at the site is dispersed in museums all over the world, there's still enough on show here to give you some idea of the culture and daily life of the city. Some of the best **carved stone idols** and **friezes** are kept here, and there's a big collection of **ceramics** which are the main means used to distinguish between the different eras in Tiwanaku civilization. The earliest pottery, from between about 1000 and 300 BC – a period known as the Village Stage or Tiwanaku I – consists mainly of simple but well-made pots decorated with geometric incisions and designs painted in red, white and yellow on a chestnut-brown background. Even at this stage, many of the most distinctive features of Tiwanaku decorative art are in evidence, including puma and bird motifs. Ceramics from the period known as the Urban Stage – Tiwanaku II, from about the first century AD – show a clear advance in quality and design, with finely made pots richly painted with multiple colours and highly burnished. Along with sculpture, metallurgy and stonework, pottery reached new heights of perfection in the Late Urban, Classical and Expansive periods, running through to the end of the first millennium AD. The pots become ever more elaborate, with characteristic flared goblets with undulating rims and incense-burners in the shape of animals or humans. The iconography, too, becomes ever more distinctive, with complex geometric patterns and highly stylised feline and serpentine figures. Some are decorated with distinctive human faces which make it easy to believe the local Aymara when they claim to be directly descended from the builders of Tiwanaku.

Also on display are fragments of **textiles**, woven with the most extraordinary skill, that offer a glimpse of what was probably considered the highest art form in Tiwanaku. Beautifully decorated with complex designs laden with symbolic meanings, these textiles were no doubt important repositories of knowledge in a society without writing, and it's thought they were valued above all other man-made articles. Sadly, very few complete weavings have survived the ravages of time and climate (those that have were mostly found in the deserts of the Pacific coast), but it's thought that textiles were extensively used in Tiwanaku, with the walls and floors of the temples and palaces being decorated with multicoloured tapestries and the stone statues dressed in beautifully woven alpac- and vicuña-wool clothes.

Finally, there are several **elongated skulls** on display, revealing the bizarre custom of trepanning which was widely practised in Tiwanaku, as in many other ancient Andean societies. The heads of children were strapped in a kind of wooden vice from an early age to produce distinctive pointed heads. This deliberate cranial deformation was presumably carried out for aesthetic reasons, rather like modern cosmetic surgery, though it may also have been related to class distinction or have had mystical implications.

Akapana

As you enter the ruins, the big mound on your right is **Akapana**, a great earth pyramid with seven terraced platforms faced with stone. This was the biggest structure in the complex and is thought to have been the city's most important religious centre. From the west it now looks more like a hill than a man-made feature, but you can still make out the pyramid's seven tiers, and some of the huge stone blocks are still in evidence on the east side, many of them carved with a step motif characteristic of Tiwanaku.

Akapana is thought to have been constructed as an imitation of a sacred mountain, with a system of internal and external water channels and tanks inside the pyramid representing lakes and rivers. Measuring about 180m by 140m and some 18m tall, the structure is so huge that archeologists at first thought it had been built around a natural hill, but they now believe it was entirely man-made, a monumental achievement that testifies to the empire's extraordinary organizational capacity and the importance of the city's religious and ceremonial functions. There are good views of the rest of the site from the summit, and local Aymaras still sometimes come here to make ritual offerings to the sacred snowcapped peak of Illimani, the most important of the mountain gods, which is clearly visible to the east.

Kalasasaya

Next to Akapana to the north is **Kalasasaya**, a walled temple compound that's thought to have been the sacred centre of Tiwanaku, where the ruling god-emperors were buried. The stone walls of the complex are amongst the most impressive masonry still standing at the site, made with colossal megaliths weighing up to 150 tonnes interspersed with smaller blocks and with carved stone drains that may also have been related to the ritual importance of water.

Just inside the entrance on the north side is the iconic **Puerta del Sol** – the Gateway of the Sun – an elaborately decorated portico carved from a single piece of rock weighing ten tonnes that has sadly been broken, probably when it was moved here from its original location, believed to have been Puma Punku.

The **central figure** above the doorway is the best-known image of Tiwanaku, probably the supreme creator god known to the Aymara as Thunupa and to the Incas as Viracocha. The 24 rays emanating from his head have led some to think of him as a sun god, but there's not much evidence to suggest such a cult existed before the Incas: it's more likely that they're just a stylized representation of hair. Some of the rays end in pumas' heads, and the central figure is surrounded by winged human forms with the heads of condors. Elsewhere around the site there are several representations of serpents, and these three animals – condors, pumas and snakes – are all still revered throughout the Andes as messengers of the gods, representing the heavens, earth and underworld respectively. Several other features seem to confirm the central figure's status as a supreme deity. In each hand he holds a staff very similar to those still used today in traditional Andean communities as symbols of authority, while the stylized tears that fall from his eyes are probably related to his role as a rainmaker. From his arms hang severed heads, probably trophies of war. These are no mere metaphors: sixteen headless bodies were found during excavations in the Akapana pyramid, and human sacrifices involving decapitation are still occasionally reported around the shores of Lago Titicaca.

Kalasasaya means standing stones in Aymara, a reference to the many **statues** that were found here. Two still remain: the most impressive stands on a raised platform in the centre of the complex, a three-metre-tall anthropomorphic figure with an inscrutable face holding a ceremonial drinking cup in his hands. The platform is surrounded on three sides by another stone wall, on the northwest corner of which is a hole in one of the stones which amplifies sound if you put your ear to it. In front of the statue to the east, a massive doorway opens onto stairs carved from a great stone block that lead down to the Templete Semi-Subterraneo. The whole Kalasasaya complex is astronomically aligned so that the sun appears in the centre of this doorway at the spring and autumn equinoxes. The doorway is usually sealed off, however, so to reach the Templete Semi-Subterraneo you have to walk back out and around the Kalasasaya compound.

Just west of Kalasasaya, ongoing excavations have revealed the remains of another extensive complex, known as **Putini**, which was probably a residential area for the city's ruling elite, or possibly a burial area. Several enormous stones cut with holes big enough to accommodate human bodies led early twentieth-century investigators, no doubt influenced by their contemporaries' fascination with Egyptology, to call it the "Palace of the Sarcophagi". You can make out the foundations of several buildings and a large central square, which was originally paved with stone. A little to the north, the **Puerta de la Luna** – the Gateway of the Moon – is another gateway cut from a single piece of stone, though smaller and without the elaborate decoration of the Puerta del Sol.

Templete Semi-Subterraneo

The **Templete Semi-Subterraneo** – the Semi-Subterranean Temple – is a sunken rectangular patio about 2m deep whose walls are studded with almost two hundred carved stone heads, which jut out like keystones. These are thought to represent the gods of different ethnic groups conquered and absorbed into the expanding empire – they may even have been idols taken from these peoples and held as symbolic hostages to represent their submission to the supremacy of Tiwanaku. Three anthropomorphic stone statues stand in the centre of the patio: the largest – known as the **Estela Barbada** because it appears to be bearded – is one of the oldest at Tiwanaku, intricately carved from red sandstone, with images of serpents on either side and pumas at its feet.

The much larger Bennett Monolith, now in the mock-up of the Templete outside the football stadium in La Paz (see p.123), was originally unearthed here. East of the Templete amongst a jumble of fallen stones known as **Kantat Hallita** are two worth examining: one is a huge, beautifully decorated lintel, the other a flat stone carved with what appears to be an architectural model of a building, possibly Kalasasaya.

Puma Punku

Set apart from the main complex, some 2m to the south (unless you've come on a tour or have your own vehicle, you'll have to walk – worth it if you want a fuller grasp of the immensity of the task Tiwanaku's architects set themselves) on the other side of the road and the abandoned railway, are the ruins of another major pyramid, **Puma Punko** – the Gateway of the Puma. Similar in style and function to Akapana, though slightly smaller, this pyramid is believed to have been built some two hundred years later, in around 700 AD. It's difficult to imagine what the building must have looked like when still standing, but the first Spanish chroniclers to come here described a great stone hall with windows. The skill and exactitude with which the massive stone blocks were carved is deeply impressive, particularly in a society without iron tools. The enormous floor slabs are cut with notches that provided a snug fit for the megalithic blocks, which were joined together perfectly to form the walls. Some of these were held together with copper cramps that were hammered into the T-shaped depressions you can see cut into adjacent sides of the blocks.

Practicalities

Minibuses to Tiwanaku depart from the corner of Aliaga and Eyzaguirre in the cemetery district in La Paz (every 30min; 1hr 30min; $3.10); on the way back they leave from the square in Tiwanaku town, though you can flag them down as they pass the entrance to the ruins. Most tour agencies in La Paz (see p.114) run one-day **tours** to the site for about $20 per person. You can hire a **guide** outside the museum to show you around the ruins for about $2 an hour, but if you want a guided tour you're better off coming with an agency from La Paz.

For most people a one-day visit to Tiwanaku is enough, but if you want to overnight, reasonable **accommodation** is available at the *Hotel Tiahuanaco* (☎02/2898541; ⑤), on Calle Bolivar 803. There are a couple of slightly overpriced **restaurants** next to the museum, and several more basic places to eat on the main square in Tiwanaku town. You can buy copies of Tiwanaku **sculpture and pottery** outside the entrance to the site.

Valle de la Luna, Mallasa and La Muela del Diablo

South of La Paz, just beyond the last suburbs of the ever-expanding Zona Sur, the harsh, arid landscape of the La Paz valley provides an easy escape from the city, and at less than 3500m is a good place to do some light walking if you're having trouble acclimatizing. Two particular areas here make reasonable places for short hikes: the **Valle de la Luna** and the **Muela del Diablo**. The former is also close to **Mallasa**, a pleasant outlying village popular with Paceños on weekend excursions and home to the **La Paz Zoo**. Both are easily reached by public transport from La Paz and can be combined to make a full day out; if you want to do this, you don't need to come all the way back to La Paz between the two: just get a micro back as far as the Zona Sur and set off again from there. Many of the La Paz tour agencies (see p.114) also offer excursions to the Valle de la Luna and Muela del Diablo, often either together or as part of a wider city tour. Going this way is quicker and a bit easier, but you won't have time to do much more than take a few photos.

The Valle de la Luna and Mallasa

From Calacoto, the southernmost suburb of the Zona Sur in La Paz, a road follows the course of the Río Choqueyapu about 5km southeast towards Mallasa, passing through a stretch of eerie, cactus-strewn badlands known as the **Valle de la Luna**. Scarred by deep canyons and strange formations of clay and rock carved by seasonal rains into pinnacles resembling church organ pipes, the valley is a popular excursion from the city and makes a pleasant area for a half-day walk, though if you're travelling in the Bolivian highlands for any length of time, you may find the scenery here rather tame by comparison. To reach the valley take any micro heading to Mallasa from Plaza del Estudiante in La Paz (these include #11, #231 and #253) and get off shortly after the road passes through two tunnels. Just before a right turn leading to the Mallasa golf course (predictably dubbed the world's highest), you can walk down into the valley on a marginal path that leads off the road to the left.

If you're in the area it's worth continuing to **MALLASA** to have a drink or something to eat in one of the many restaurants and snack bars, chief among them the restaurant in *Hotel Oberland* (ⓣ02/2745040, ⓦwww.h-oberland.com), on Calle El Agrario 3118, which serves Swiss staples like fondue alongside upmarket versions of traditional Bolivian dishes and garden BBQ'd meats, and to visit the surprisingly good **La Paz Zoo** (daily 10am–5pm; $0.50) – though the big cats and the larger birds look pretty miserable, most of the animals have fairly spacious enclosures. Set in ample parkland and shaded by eucalyptus groves, the zoo is a good place to familiarize yourself with Bolivian wildlife, and home to a comprehensive collection of the nation's fauna, including the rare Andean spectacled bear, pumas, jaguars, llamas, vicuñas and all manner of birds.

La Muela del Diablo

Set amid a similar badlands landscape east of Calacoto, the volcanic outcrop known as **La Muela del Diablo** – the Devil's Molar – makes another good half-day trip out of the city. To get there, take a micro (#207 or #288) from the Plaza del Estudiante in La Paz to the outlying village of Pedregal, a couple of kilometres beyond the spreading urbanization of the Zona Sur. From Pedregal, it's a good hour or so steeply uphill to the foot of the Muela – the trail starts behind the cemetery and is easy to follow. The jagged rock formation is impressive rather than spectacular, especially if you've already travelled elsewhere in the high Andes, but the views back across the desert-like landscape towards La Paz are a dramatic reminder of just what an inhospitable and unlikely place this was to build a major city. You can climb the Muela, though this is not advisable without experience and some basic equipment. Further trails lead around the back of the peak and down towards Mallasa, but there's no bridge at the moment and crossing the heavily polluted waters of the Choqueyapu isn't recommended: it's better to go back the way you came. Be sure to take plenty of water if you go hiking in this area.

Chacaltaya

About 40km north of La Paz, **Chacaltaya** is Bolivia's only developed ski slope and, at over 5000m above sea level, the highest in the world. The skiing here isn't actually that great; the piste is getting shorter by the year as the glacier retreats at an unprecedented rate. In a recent article in the *New York Times*, the director of the Institute of Geological Investigation at La Paz's San Andrés University suggested that Chacaltaya has as little as three years left before it melts completely. Quite apart from the skiing, or even the opportunity to witness global warming first-hand, it's worth visiting just for the magnificent high-Andean scenery, even if you need to be altitude-acclimatized first (a more pertinent consideration now that the resort is minus a functioning lift). You'll have to hoof it to the top of the slope, but from up here the massive icebound peak of Illimani seems close enough to touch, while La Paz and El Alto, far below in the Altiplano, look minuscule by comparison. You can also see the crystalline waters of Lago Titicaca to the west, with the mountains of Peru rising behind, and on clear days the volcanic cone of Sajama, Bolivia's highest mountain, is visible far across the Altiplano to the southwest. If you make the short climb up the peak of **Mount Chacaltaya** behind the ski refuge, the views open up still more, a truly breathtaking panorama. There can't be many places in the world where you can climb to such a high altitude – the peak is about 5500m above sea level – with relatively so little effort. Just below the refuge, next to the lift machinery, there's a four-metre glass pyramid which is claimed (inevitably) to be the highest in the world, and which is supposedly built to the exact proportions of the Great Pyramid in Egypt.

Practicalities

Chacaltaya is managed by the **Club Andino Boliviano**, which has its offices at Calle Mexico 1638 (at the end of a dingy corridor and up a flight of stairs) just up from Plaza Estudiante (open Mon–Fri 9am–noon & 3–7pm; ⓣ&ⓕ02/2312875, ⓣ02/2250658 or 71260958 outside office hours, ⓔfecab@bolivia.com). They run a **bus service** up to the ski lodge every Saturday, and on weekdays if there are six or more passengers, leaving at 8.30am and returning in the afternoon ($6 per person). The journey takes about two hours, though you may have to walk the last few hundred metres if there has been a recent snowfall. Several tour agencies in La Paz (see p.114) also take groups up, but tend to charge a bit more. The ski refuge has a small **restaurant** where you can get basic meals and hot drinks: many consider coca tea essential at this altitude, though others favour the delicious hot chocolate with rum. The well-insulated refuge also offers overnight **accommodation** in a choice of dormitory or en-suite private room for $3–5 per person; more rooms are currently under construction. If you're feeling energetic, optimistic and there's enough snow, the ski season runs roughly from November to March. The slope is open from 10am to 5pm and a lift pass costs $5 (should they get around to fixing the thing, that is). You can hire skis or a snowboard for $10, though the equipment is not very good. Note that because of the danger of **altitude sickness** you shouldn't come up here unless you've already adjusted to the altitude of La Paz. Conversely, if you're planning some high-altitude climbing, Chacaltaya is a good place to acclimatize. Take plenty of warm clothing as well as sunscreen and sunglasses.

2

Lago Titicaca, the Cordillera Real and the Yungas

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CHILE
PARAGUAY
ARGENTINA

CHAPTER 2

Highlights

- **Copacabana** Beautifully located on the shores of Lago Titicaca, this pretty town is also a major pilgrimage centre, and home to the Virgen de Copacabana, Bolivia's most revered religious image. **See p.133**

- **Isla del Sol** The spiritual centre of the Andean world, set amidst the deep blue waters of Lago Titicaca and dotted with ancient ruins and traditional Aymara communities. **See p.141**

- **Inca trails** Running from the high Andes down into the humid subtropical valleys of the Yungas, Bolivia's three "Inca" trails – the Choro, Takesi and Yunga Cruz – are amongst the best trekking routes in the country. **See p.150**

- **Sorata** Nestling in a deep valley at the heart of the Cordillera Real, the charming town of Sorata is the perfect base for trekking in the surrounding mountains. **See p.153**

- **Cordillera Apolobamba** This remote and beautiful mountain range offers some of the best trekking in Bolivia, and is also home to the mysterious Kallawaya medicine men. **See p.158**

- **Mountain-biking to Coroico** Descending over 3500m in a day, the mountain-bike trip from La Paz down to Coroico is one of the world's most breathtaking rides. **See p.167**

- **Coroico** Scenically set amidst the lush subtropical valleys of the Yungas, this charming resort town offers the perfect antidote to the cold of the nearby Altiplano. **See p.168**

▲ Riding the World's Most Dangerous Road

2

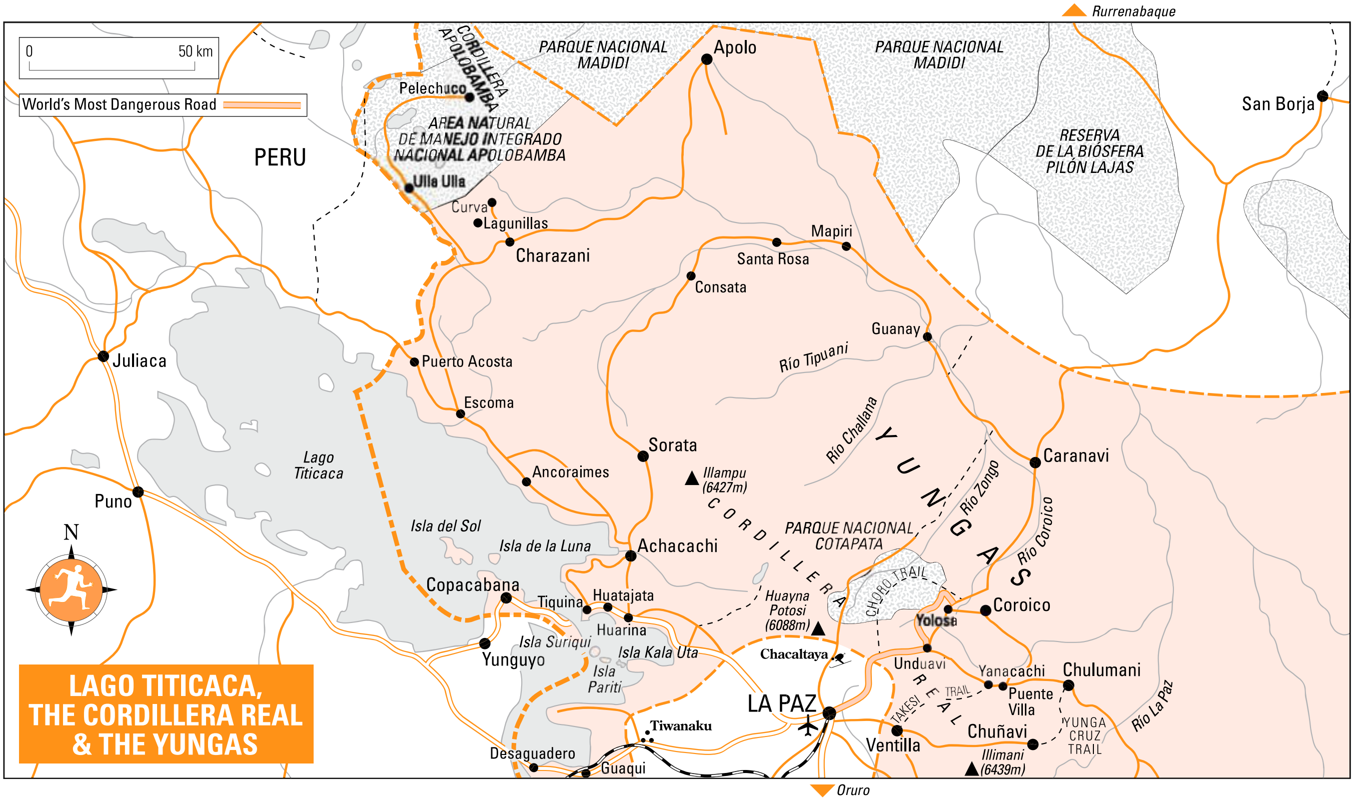
Lago Titicaca, the Cordillera Real and the Yungas

The region immediately around La Paz is sometimes known as "Little Bolivia", because the variety of landscapes it encompasses can seem like a microcosm of the entire country. La Paz itself lies in a canyon gouged out of the northern end of the Altiplano, the rolling, 3800-metre-high plateau that stretches between the eastern and western chains of the Andes – the Cordilleras Oriental and Occidental – as they march south through Bolivia. Some 75km northwest of La Paz lies **Lago Titicaca**, the vast, high-altitude lake that straddles the border with Peru and dominates the northern Altiplano, its deep waters a vivid blue against the parched grasslands that surround it. The best base from which to explore the Bolivian side of Lago Titicaca is **Copacabana**, a small town close to the Peruvian border which is the home of the country's most revered religious image and an important Catholic pilgrimage centre. It's also the jumping-off point for boat trips to **Isla del Sol** and **Isla de la Luna**, two idyllic islands inhabited by deeply traditional peasant communities and dotted with the ruins of Inca temples and shrines which attest to the lake's position as the sacred centre of the Andean world.

Just east of Lago Titicaca is the **Cordillera Real**, the highest and most spectacular section of the Cordillera Oriental within Bolivia. Stretching some 160km along the edge of the Altiplano, from **Mount Illimani** (6439m), southeast of La Paz, to the **Illampu** massif (6370m), which towers over the eastern side of Lago Titicaca, the Cordillera Real can easily be explored from La Paz itself. Some of the best **treks** start close to the city. Alternatively, hikers can base themselves in the delightful colonial town of **Sorata**, at the northwestern end of the range. Further north, on the border with Peru, the isolated **Cordillera Apolobamba** (also part of the Cordillera Oriental) offers similar trekking and climbing opportunities in a far more remote setting.

Some of the most popular treks in the Cordillera Real – the **Choro**, **Takesi** and **Yunga Cruz** trails – actually go right across the range, following pre-Hispanic paved trails that connect the Altiplano with the **Yungas**, a series

LAGO TITICACA, THE CORDILLERA REAL & THE YUNGAS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PARQUE NACIONAL MADIDI
RESERVA DE LA BIÓSFERA PILÓN LAJAS
CORDILLERA APOLOBAMBA
AREA NATURAL DE MANEJO INTEGRADO NACIONAL APOLOBAMBA
Pelechuco
Ulla Ulla
Curva
Lagunillas
Charazani
Apolo
San Borja
Mapiri
Santa Rosa
Consata
Guanay
Río Tipuani
Río Challana
YUNGAS
Caranavi
Río Zongo
Río Coroico
Juliaca
Puerto Acosta
Escoma
Sorata
Illampu (6427m)
CORDILLERA REAL
PARQUE NACIONAL COTAPATA
Lago Titicaca
Puno
Ancoraimes
Isla del Sol
Isla de la Luna
Achacachi
Copacabana
Tiquina
Huatajata
Huarina
Huayna Potosí (6088m)
CHORO TRAIL
Yolosa
Coroico
Isla Suriqui
Isla Kala Uta
Isla Pariti
Yunguyo
Chacaltaya
Unduavi
Yanacachi
TRAIL
Chulumani
Puente Villa
TAKESI
LA PAZ
Tiwanaku
Chuñavi
YUNGA CRUZ TRAIL
Río La Paz
Ventilla
Illimani (6439m)
Desaguadero
Guaqui

of deep valleys where the northeastern slopes of the Andes plunge down into the Amazon lowlands. The Yungas' rugged, forest-covered mountains, rushing rivers and warm, fertile valleys offer the starkest possible contrast to the austere cordillera and arid Altiplano, both of which are just a few hours away by road. With a new concrete and asphalt highway finally inaugurated in December 2006, the old hair-raising route down to the Yungas from La Paz – often described as the most dangerous in the world – is now largely the domain of mountain bikers glad to finally have it to themselves after years of occasionally fatal run-ins with trucks and buses. The most popular Yungas destination is **Coroico**, a pleasant resort town set amid beautiful scenery just off the Yungas road, though you could also base yourself in the less touristy town of **Chulumani**, which is reached by a less dramatic but still scenic road and is set amidst equally spectacular scenery.

Lago Titicaca

An immense, sapphire-blue lake sitting astride the border with Peru at the northern end of the Altiplano, **LAGO TITICACA** is one of the classic images of Bolivia, and few scenes are more evocative of the country than the sight of a poncho-clad fisherman paddling across its azure waters against the backdrop of snowcapped mountains. Set at an altitude of 3810m, and measuring some 190km by 80km, it's by far the biggest high-altitude body of water in the world – the remnant of an ancient inland sea which was formed as the Andes were thrust up from the ocean floor. The area around the lake is the heartland of the **Aymara**, whose distinct language and culture have survived centuries of domination, first by the Incas, then by the Spanish, and who continue to cultivate maize on ancient mountainside terraces around the lake, grow barley, quinoa and potatoes on the fertile plains, and raise herds of llamas, alpacas, cattle and sheep. The lake itself is rich in fish, and the water it contains stores the heat of the sun and then releases it overnight, raising average temperatures around its shores, extending the growing season and making the region one of the most productive in the high Andes. Lago Titicaca is fed by a number of rivers that carry rainfall down from the Cordillera Real and across the Altiplano, though none of its waters ever reaches the sea, and almost ninety percent of the lake's water loss is through evaporation (the rest is drained by its only outlet, the Río Desaguadero, which flows south before disappearing in the salt lakes of Uru Uru and Poopó). Because of the large area it drains, the water level in the lake fluctuates sharply with slight variations in rainfall, and every few years the low plains around its shores are flooded.

Titicaca has always played a dominant role in Andean religious conceptions. As the single biggest body of water in this arid region, it's considered a powerful female deity that controls climate and rainfall, and the Incas believed that the creator god Viracocha rose from its waters, calling forth the sun and moon to light up the world. The Incas also claimed their own ancestors came into being here, and the remains of their shrines and temples can still be seen on **Isla del Sol** (Island of the Sun) and nearby **Isla de la Luna** (Island of the Moon),

Luxury cruises on Lago Titicaca

Two upmarket La Paz tour agencies offer **luxury cruises** on Lago Titicaca – they're also the only regular way to reach Peru from Bolivia by water. Transturin (Alfredo Ascarrunz 2518, Sopocachi Ⓣ02/2422222, Ⓕ02/2411922, Ⓦwww.transturin.com) run one- and two-day sightseeing tours to Copacabana and Isla del Sol, plus trips to Puno on the Peruvian side of the lake, in luxurious catamarans from their dock at Chúa, a few kilometres west of Huatajata. A two-day cruise with an overnight stay at their comfortable *Hotel Titicaca*, also in Chúa, costs a hefty $300 or so per person. Crillon Tours (Av Camacho 1223 Ⓣ02/2337533, Ⓦwww.titicaca.com) run a similar service, with faster luxury hydrofoils from Huatajata. A convoluted array of packages includes day-trips to both Copacabana and Puno, as well as longer journeys with overnight accommodation at either the classy *Inca Utama Hotel and Spa* in Huatajata or at the exclusive *Posada del Inca Ecolodge* on Isla del Sol. Their trips are similarly priced at a little under $130 per person per day.

whose serene beauty and tranquillity is a highlight of any visit to the lake. Nor did Lago Titicaca lose its religious importance with the advent of Christianity: it's no coincidence that Bolivia's most important Catholic shrine can be found in **Copacabana**, the lakeside town closest to Isla del Sol.

La Paz to Copacabana

The main road to Lago Titicaca from La Paz runs northwest across the Altiplano, with the majestic peaks of the Cordillera Real rising imperiously to the north. Shortly after the lake first comes into view, about 75km from La Paz, the road forks at the small town of **Huarina**. One branch heads north towards the town of Achacachi (see p.148), from where you can continue to Sorata in the Cordillera Real (see p.153), or along the remote east coast of the lake and up into the Cordillera Apolobamba (see p.158). The other branch continues west towards Copacabana, running along the north shore of the smaller section of the lake, known as **Wiñay Marka** or Lago Menor, which is joined to the main body of the lake by the narrow straits of Tiquina.

Strung out along this road about 10km further west is **HUATAJATA**, a lakeside resort village popular with Paceños, who come here to eat fresh trout and drink beer whilst enjoying the lake views from the dozen or so restaurants along the shore. Almost all these restaurants also run boat trips out to the nearby islands of Suriqui, Pariti and Kala Uta. About 45 minutes by motor boat from Huatajata, **Isla Suriqui** is home to a small fishing community that still uses traditional boats made from the totora reeds that grow all around the lake. In the 1970s the boatmakers of Suriqui put their ancient skills to work for the Norwegian explorer Thor Heyerdahl, helping him design and build the *Ra II*, a large reed boat in which he sailed from Africa to the Caribbean in an attempt to prove that transatlantic travel was possible using ancient technology. Partly as a result of the fame that followed this, Isla Suriqui is now rather over-touristed, but you still get a glimpse of a lakeside lifestyle that has changed little over the centuries. Just to the south, the smaller **Isla Pariti** is home to another small Aymara fishing community, while close by, connected to the mainland by a narrow spit when the level of the lake is low, **Isla Kala Uta** has a series of stone tombs, known as *chullpas*, which were built by the Aymara-speaking tribes who dominated this area before the Inca conquest. Almost all the restaurants in Huatajata hire out boats to visit the islands: a motorboat should cost you about $25; a sailboat will cost less but take considerably longer – allowing the best part of a day should give you at least a couple of hours to explore.

From Huatajata the road continues another 26km west to the **Estrecho de Tiquina**, the narrow stretch of water that joins Wiñay Marka with the main body of the lake, known as Lago Mayor, and separates the Copacabana peninsula from the rest of Bolivia. All motor vehicles heading to Copacabana cross the straits on barges. Passengers have to get off and cross on little launches ($0.20), a safety requirement introduced after a barge capsized, sending a bus and many of its passengers to the bottom of the lake. Outside the rivers of the Amazon lowlands, this is one of the few places where you'll see the Bolivian Navy. Deprived of access to the seas, Lago Titicaca is one of the few places they have to float a boat, though this doesn't stop them from appointing a full complement of admirals. Naval troops may ask to see your passport here, and hand out life jackets to wear on the ten-minute crossing. From San Pedro on the west side of the straits, it's another 40km or so to Copacabana.

Copacabana and around

The pleasant little town of **COPACABANA** overlooks the deep blue waters of Lago Titicaca just a few kilometres from the Peruvian border. As well as being a good base from which to explore the Bolivian side of the lake, the town is also the most important Catholic pilgrimage site in the country, being home to Bolivia's most revered image, the **Virgen de Copacabana**. Several times annually the town is overwhelmed by thousands of religious devotees who come to pay homage to the Virgin in colourful religious **fiestas**, while the rest of the year sees a steady stream of pilgrims arriving to seek the Virgin's blessing. Copacabana is also the jumping-off point for visits to **Isla del Sol** and **Isla de la Luna**, Titicaca's two sacred islands, while a series of mysterious **Inca ruins** within easy walking distance of the town show that this was a site of great spiritual importance long before Christianity reached the Andes.

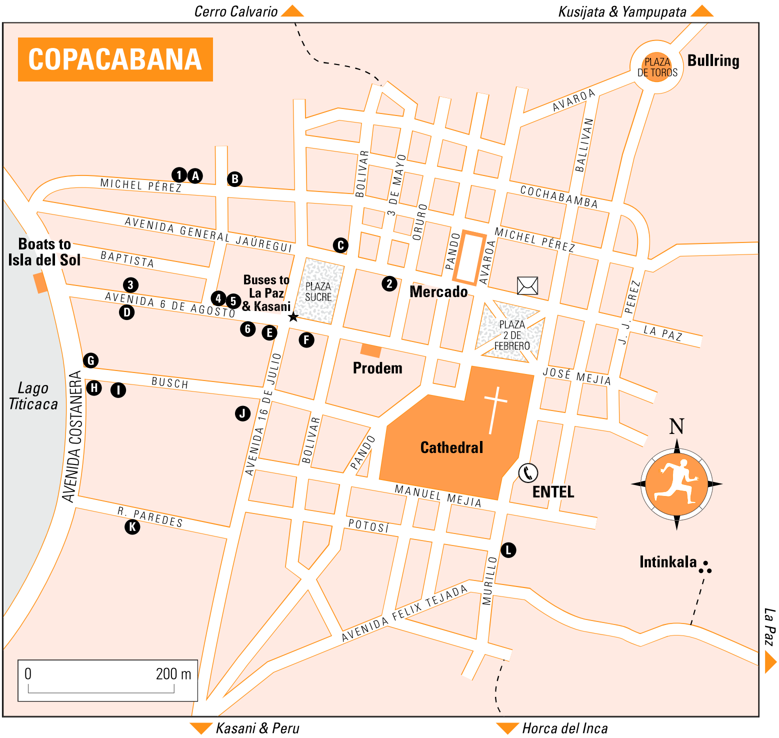
Fiestas in Copacabana

Copacabana's main religious fiestas are the **Fiesta de la Virgen de la Candelaria** (Feb 2) and the **Coronación de la Virgen de Copacabana** (Aug 5), both of which attract thousands of pilgrims and revellers from all over Bolivia and southern Peru. The statue of the Virgin is paraded around town in processions accompanied by massed brass bands and numerous colourful folkloric dance troupes. Several days of eating, drinking, dancing and fireworks culminate in chaotic bullfights held in the ring on the northern outskirts of town. **Semana Santa** (Easter) is an altogether more solemn occasion. Many pilgrims walk to Copacabana from as far away as La Paz in penance, and thousands more take part in a candlelit nocturnal procession up the slopes of Cerro Calvario, where they pray for the forgiveness of their sins and material success in the coming years. Far more mysterious and distinctly non-Christian ceremonies are staged on the night of June 21 to celebrate the winter solstice and **Aymara New Year**, when small crowds led by traditional Aymara religious leaders gather to perform ceremonies at the Horca del Inca and Intinkala – two ancient shrines on the outskirts of town.

Arrival, information and accommodation

Copacabana is a small town and it's easy to find your way around. **Buses** and **micros** from La Paz and Kasani at the Peruvian border arrive and depart from on and just off Plaza Sucre, midway between the lake shore and the central Plaza 2 de Febrero. There's a rudimentary tourist **information office** by the police station on Plaza 2 de Febrero, but opening hours are erratic, and the cluster of tour agencies on and around Plaza Sucre is a better source of information on how to get to the islands in the lake or on to Peru – the two main services they offer. If you're staying at the *Hostal La Cúpula* the staff there can give you good information and advice on Copacabana and the surrounding area; the owners even speak English.

The Casa de Cambio Copacabana, at the eastern end of Avenida 6 de Agosto, changes US dollars and **traveller's cheques**, as do several of the artesanía shops on Plaza 2 de Febrero; there's no international ATM in town but Prodem on Avenida 6 de Agosto can service Visa and Mastercard transactions at a hefty charge of 5 percent There are several **Internet** outlets on Avenida 6 de Agosto,


COPACABANA
Cerro Calvario
Kusijata & Yampupata
PLAZA DE TOROS
Bullring
AVAROA
BALLIVAN
MICHEL PÉREZ
AVENIDA GENERAL JAÚREGUI
BAPTISTA
AVENIDA 6 DE AGOSTO
BUSCH
AVENIDA COSTANERA
R. PAREDES
Boats to Isla del Sol
Lago Titicaca
BOLIVAR
3 DE MAYO
ORURO
PANDO
AVAROA
COCHABAMBA
MICHEL PÉREZ
J. J. PEREZ
LA PAZ
JOSÉ MEJIA
Buses to La Paz & Kasani
PLAZA SUCRE
Mercado
PLAZA 2 DE FEBRERO
Prodem
Cathedral
ENTEL
AVENIDA 16 DE JULIO
BOLIVAR
PANDO
MANUEL MEJIA
POTOSÍ
MURILLO
AVENIDA FELIX TEJADA
Intinkala
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La Paz
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Kasani & Peru
Horca del Inca
1
2
3
4
5
6
A
B
C
D
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G
H
I
J
K
L

ACCOMMODATION

Hostal Center	F
Hostal Colonial del Lago	E
Hostal La Cúpula	A
Hostal Emperador	L
Hostal Leyenda	G
Hostal Wara	D
Hotel Ambassador	C
Hotel Gloria	J
Hotel Los Andes	I
Hotel Mirador	H
Hotel Rosario del Lago	K
Hotel Utama	B

RESTAURANTS, BARS & CAFÉS

Akwaaba	6
La Cúpula	1
Kota Kahuaña	K
Mankha Uta	3
Nemos Bar	5
La Posta	4
Sujma Wasi	2

▲ Copacabana Cathedral

while the **post office** is on Plaza 2 de Febrero, though if you're heading to La Paz you're better off posting letters when you get there. The **ENTEL** office is a block south of Plaza 2 de Febrero on Calle Murillo.

Accommodation

Due to its role as a pilgrimage centre, Copacabana has an enormous number of **places to stay**. Most are simple and very inexpensive *alojamientos* and *residenciales* catering mainly to Bolivian and Peruvian pilgrims, but recent years have seen a surge in more comfortable mid-range and upmarket places aimed specifically at foreign tourists. The abundance of accommodation doesn't mean it's easy to find a room during the main fiestas, however, when everything fills up fast and prices double or treble.

Hostal Center Av 6 de Agosto ⓣ02/8622230. Right on Plaza Sucre, this is arguably the best of Copacabana's bargain-basement traveller haunts. Run by the owner of *La Posta*, it houses three floors of clean, modern, functional rooms with hot water on tap. An adjoining restaurant featuring Japanese, Thai, French and Spanish food was nearing completion at the time of writing. ②

Hostal Colonial Del Lago Av 6 de Agosto and Av 16 de Julio ⓣ02/8622270, ⓦwww.titicacabolivia.com. Literally a stone's throw from the bus stop and great value to boot, this late 1990s landmark has aged fairly well. Floors are nicely scuffed, corridors are bright and leafy and the spotless rooms are generous with light although views from the huge windows are blocked by the construction of a red-brick monstrosity. On the plus side, the inclusive breakfast is served on a lovely patio. ③

Hostal Emperador Murillo 235 ⓣ02/71258184. Budget option with an enduring popularity among backpackers that's difficult to fathom, especially given the awful colour scheme and a dilapidated sign which suggests it closed down years ago. If you're intrepid enough to venture down the shocking pink alleyway, you'll find clean, simple rooms (with or without bath) around a fairly bare courtyard; those to the rear have recently been done up. The staff is helpful, there are rudimentary kitchen and laundry facilities, and non-inclusive breakfast is available. ②

Hostal La Cúpula Michel Pérez 1–3 ⓣ&ⓕ02/8622029, ⓦwww.hotelcupula.com. Delightful European-owned hotel built in a neo-Moorish style on a hillside overlooking the town and lake. Whitewashed arches lend an Andalucian air of seclusion which extends to the bamboo-furnished rooms (with or without bath) and a hammock-slung garden. The staff is helpful, and facilities include a kitchen and laundry, video and games room, and a famed restaurant. Arguably their greatest perk, though – one which blue-toed travellers can only pray other Altiplano hoteliers follow – is the provision of hot water bottles. ③–④

Hostal Leyenda Av Costanera and Busch ⓣ02/71926333. Combining faux-colonial extravagance with elaborate neo-native trimmings, this stylish if incongruous *hostal* enjoys an enviable beachfront position. Rooms (all with private bath) are equally creative, kitted out with carved furniture and nice touches like reed lampshades. There's also a charming little garden, although service can be off-puttingly surly. Breakfast included ③

Hostal Wara Beach end of 6 de Agosto (no phone). The closest budget option to the beach, with endless flights of backpacker-frequented, parquet-floored rooms. The lofty rooftop terrace has great views and lounging potential, a sink for washing clothes and, for those who can stand the heat, a couple of stand-alone rooms. ②

Hotel Ambassador Jaúregui and Plaza Sucre ⓣ02/8622216. The faded grand dame of Copacabana hostelry, offering a warren of creaking, characterful rooms giving onto cobbled corridors. Some are a bit dark and slightly fusty but the whitewashed charm, old photos and net-curtained windows make up for it, and the option of no TV is always a bonus. Look out for the kitschy shrine hogging the courtyard. ②

Hotel Gloria Av 16 de Julio ⓣ02/8622094. Grand hotel run by the same company as its namesakes in La Paz and Coroico. While graceless steel-framed windows and slightly boxy – if comfortable – rooms betray the hotel's age, the bay-windowed dining room is the most elegant in town, with breathtaking views over the lake. There's also a games room (table football included) with equally great views and acres of scruffy garden to wander around. ⑤

Hotel Los Andes Av Busch between Av 16 de Julio and Costanera ⓣ02/8622103, ⓔfvelasquez@entelnet.bo. Stacked up behind the *Mirador*, this spanking-new hotel offers bigger rooms if not better views, and it's close enough to smell the lake air. Clean and very friendly, with solar-assisted hot water 24hrs a day. ④

Hotel Mirador Av Busch and Costanera ⓣ02/8622289, ⓦwww.titicacabolivia.com. Pastel yellow rooms framing an azure Titicaca make this seafront behemoth an attractive, great-value choice. As elsewhere in Copacabana, the architectural style is determinedly quasi-colonial even if the imposing columns and wooden-railed staircases lend a strangely subcontinental feel. English spoken and continental buffet breakfast included. ③

Hotel Rosario del Lago Rigoberto Paredes and Av Costanera ⓣ02/8622141, ⓕ02/8622140, ⓦwww.hotelrosario.com/lago. Plush sister hotel to its namesake in La Paz, set near the waterfront in a modern colonial-style building. Rooms are small but very comfortable and well furnished, and have excellent views over the lake, while the spiral staircase-accessed, beam-ceilinged suite is definitely worth a splurge (US$86). Service is unfailingly polite, and there’s a renowned restaurant and luxurious terrace. Buffet breakfast included. ⑤

Hotel Utama Michell Pérez and San Antonio ⓣ02/28622013, ⓔutamacopacabana44@hotmail.com. Fairly unpromising in both its brick exterior and barn-like interior, this is nevertheless a friendly enough place, handy if you've made the hike up to *Hostel La Cúpula* only to find it full. Rooms come with cheesy bedspreads and murals, armchairs and – from the top corner rooms, 208 especially – fantastic lake views. They also promise a “Mega Breakfast”, a buffet affair with a full spread of fruit, cereal, yoghurt, etc. ③

The Town

Copacabana is a fairly untidy collection of red-tiled houses and modern concrete buildings nestled between two steep hills that provide some shelter from the winds that sometimes sweep across the lake. Though without the attractions of its more famous namesake in Brazil (which was named in honour of the shrine here), Copacabana **beach** is a pleasant place for a lakeside stroll. There are several restaurants and stalls where you can enjoy a beer and a plate of fried trout whilst looking out over the water, and you can rent pedal boats and kayaks (about $2.50 an hour) – exciting stuff for the many Bolivian visitors who have never seen the sea. It is also possible to rent motor launches ($5–10 an hour with boatman) and catch boats to Isla del Sol and Isla de Luna from here.

The Cathedral

The focal point of Copacabana is the imposing **Cathedral**, set on the Plaza 2 de Febrero six blocks east of the waterfront. Known as the “Moorish Cathedral”, it shows clear *mudéjar* influences in its design, with whitewashed stone walls and multiple domes decorated with deep-blue *azulejo* tiles. Originally built between 1589 and 1669 by the Augustinian order (and funded partly by gold and silver offerings that were still being looted from local pre-Christian shrines) to house the miraculous Virgen de Copacabana, it has since been extensively modified. The **plaza** outside the cathedral is often occupied by cars, buses and trucks, decorated with brightly coloured streamers and rosettes. These are blessed with holy water by a priest and doused liberally in beer and liquor in a weekly (Sunday) ritual known as *ch’alla,* thereby ensuring their future safety. Afterwards there’s usually enough alcohol left over for the supplicants themselves to have a drink. At fiesta times, pilgrims bring models of cars, houses and other desirable objects to be blessed, in the belief that doing so ensures that the real thing will be theirs within a year – a modern version of traditional requests for sufficient rain, bountiful harvests or successful fishing.

Between the plaza and the cathedral is a broad walled **courtyard** with a minor chapel at each corner – a layout very similar to that of pre-conquest indigenous ceremonial centres. Inside the bright vaulted interior a door beside the massive gold altarpiece leads upstairs to a small chapel that houses the **Virgen de Copacabana** herself. A surprisingly slight image, with a brown, Andean face, the Virgin is dressed in lavish robes embroidered with gold and silver thread and crowned with a golden halo, while at her feet is a wide silver crescent moon – a symbol of female divinity in traditional Andean religion. Encased in glass, the statue is only taken out of the sanctuary during fiestas: locals believe moving her at any other time could trigger catastrophic floods. A small **museum** (Tues–Sun 8.30–11.30am & 2.30–5.30pm; $0.60) inside the compound houses a collection of colonial religious art and sculpture, but this is only open to groups of five or more. To the left of the Cathedral is the **Capilla de Velas**, a side chapel where supplicants come to light candles. A dark, narrow room with an image of the Virgin at one end, the chapel is black with soot, its walls covered with rough wax images of cars and houses left there by hopeful pilgrims.

The lady of the lake

The speed with which the Virgen de Copacabana emerged as the most revered religious image in the Altiplano after the Spanish conquest suggests that her cult was simply a continuation of previous, pre-Christian religious traditions associated with Lago Titicaca. Immediately after the conquest the Inca temples around the lake were looted by Spanish treasure-seekers, followed by priests who destroyed the remaining shrines and idols. These included, at Copacabana, a large female idol with a fish's tail – probably a representation of the lake as a goddess. The town was refounded in 1573 as the parish of Santa Ana de Copacabana, but a series of devastating early frosts swiftly ensued, ruining crops and convincing locals of the need for a new supernatural protector. Santa Ana was abandoned and the town was rededicated in honour of the **Virgen de la Candelaria**, one of the most popular representations of the Virgin Mary during the Spanish conquest of the Americas.

A locally born man, **Francisco Inca Yupanqui**, grandson of the Inca Huayna Capac (himself the father of Atahualpa, whose capture by the Spanish led to the fall of the Inca empire), began fashioning an image of the Virgin. After his first crude efforts were rejected by the Spanish priests he went to Potosí to study sculpture, eventually returning with the brown-faced figure that graces the church today. The new image, called the **Virgen de Copacabana**, was immediately credited with a series of miracles, and the town quickly became the most important Catholic pilgrimage destination in the southern Andes, a position it still holds today. After independence, the Virgin was also proclaimed the religious patron of Bolivia.

Appropriately, the original Virgen de la Candelaria was also closely associated with water – and idolatory. The Spanish came across the image during their conquest of the Canary Islands in the late fifteenth century. Brown-faced and carrying a candlestick (hence "Candelaria"), it was being worshipped as an idol by the indigenous inhabitants of Tenerife, the pagan Guanches, who had found it washed up on the beach decades before. Once in Spanish hands the image was quickly deemed miraculous, and churches across the Americas were named in her honour (though it brought little luck for the Guanches, who were defeated and enslaved).

Cerro Calvario

Another interesting religious site is **Cerro Calvario**, the hill that rises steeply above the town to the north. It's a half-hour walk up to the top along a trail that begins beside the small church at the north end of Calle Bolívar, five or so blocks up from Plaza Sucre. The trail follows the stations of the cross – signs ask pilgrims not to dump stones on the summit, a reference to the distinctly pre-Christian Andean custom of carrying rocks up to high places out of respect for the mountain gods. The summit of the hill is marked by a cross from where there are splendid views over the town and across the lake, particularly at sunset. It's popular with pilgrims throughout the year, but particularly during Semana Santa (Easter), when thousands accompany the Virgen de Copacabana when she is carried up here in a candlelit procession. Several stalls sell the miniature cars and lorries, models of houses and wads of fake dollar bills that are used by pilgrims. As well as the formal Christian crosses at the top of the hill, the summit is dotted with ramshackle stone altars where pilgrims light candles, burn offerings and pour alcoholic libations to ensure their prayers are heard.

Eating and drinking

There's no shortage of **restaurants** in Copacabana, most of them catering to Bolivian and Peruvian pilgrims. Concentrated on Avenida 6 de Agosto and Calle Jáuregui, all offer unexciting set *almuerzos* and *cenas* for about $1.50–2.50, or big plates of the delicious Titicaca trout (*trucha*) cooked in a variety of different styles for about $4–6. You can find more varied (and expensive) fare at an increasing number of more upmarket restaurants aimed at foreign tourists; a couple of these also double as bars which are popular travellers' hang-outs in the evening. The **market** just off Plaza 2 de Febrero on Calle La Paz is a good place for really cheap local meals and fruit juices, and there are also several simple **foodstalls** on the waterfront where you can get inexpensive fried trout.

Akwaaba Av 6 de Agosto, near Plaza Sucre. Superlatively funky, ethnic-garbed café run by a saxophone-playing Frenchman and his partner, herself the former owner of both the La Paz and the now defunct Copacabana branches of *Café Sol y Luna*. The style is West African rather than Bolivian (the name translates as "welcome" in the Ghanaian Adinkra language), the soundtrack vintage jazz, funk and roots reggae (with occasional in-house sax), and the clientele almost exclusively boho-traveller.

La Cúpula Inside the hotel of the same name on Michel Pérez 1–3 ☎02/8622029. Probably the best food in town, with good breakfasts, salads and imaginative main courses such as trout fondue (around $5), as well as a few habitually enticing vegetarian options, all served in a luminous room over the lake. Closed Tues lunchtime.

Kota Kahuaña Inside *Hotel Rosario del Lago* on Rigoberto Paredes and Av Costanera ☎02/8622141. Lavishly paned windows with billowy views are the backdrop for some of the most adventurous cuisine in Copacabana. Highlights include trout with olive oil, garlic, white wine and orange juice and llama with quinoa and caramelized bacon. Given an hour's notice, they'll even rustle you up paella from trout, pejerrey (kingfish) and chicken. Prices won't break the bank, with most mains coming in well under $10.

Mankha Uta Av 6 de Agosto, near the beach. Friendly, glass-fronted bar/restaurant with an emphasis on live music, often performed by travellers. If you're lucky you can catch some excellent live bossa nova and other Brazilian sounds, while the menu runs the gamut from local trout and quinoa soup to pizza, lasagne and a decent set veggie menu, with main courses coming in around the $3–6 mark. Their palate-searing *pique macho* (spicy beef stew) comes recommended.

Nemos Av 6 de Agosto, next to *La Posta*. Perennially popular, Anglo-Bolivian bar with a cosy, candle-lit ambience, great sounds and a reputation – not least for the coffee and hot chocolate – which preceeds it.

La Posta Av 6 de Agosto and Cabo Zapana. Raucous pizza joint serving the best rounds of dough, cheese and tomato in Copacabana. Partly Argentine-owned with a vague tango theme and sometime Carlos Gardel soundtrack, it's usually crammed with Argentine travellers, especially if there's a football match on TV.

Sujma Wasi Jáuregui 127 ☎02/8622091. Charming cobbled courtyard with textile-topped stone tables, one block from Plaza Sucre. Veggie options are plentiful, as are the assiduously described breakfasts. Should you run out of high-factor sunscreen you can retreat to the rustic little bar, itself doubling as a *peña* at weekends.

Around Copacabana

Before the Spanish conquest the Copacabana peninsula was covered with shrines and temples built by the Incas. Though many of these were systematically destroyed by the Spanish, the area is still scattered with enigmatic ruins and strange carved stones. Three of these mysterious remains – the **Horca del Inca**, **Intinkala** and **Kusijata** – are within easy walking distance of Copacabana; entry is with a single ticket ($0.60), usually on sale at each one.

From Copacabana you can also make the pleasant four- to five-hour hike along the lakeshore, following the route taken by Inca pilgrims, to **Yampupata** at the tip of the peninsula, from where they took (and you can still take) a boat across to Isla del Sol.

Horca del Inca, Intinkala and Kusijata

High on Cerro Sancollani, the hill that rises above Copacabana to the south, stands the **Horca del Inca**, a structure formed by two vertical crags of rock, their bases buried in the ground and topped by a stone lintel, creating a rock gateway. The name means "Gallows of the Incas", but in fact this structure was almost certainly used by Inca astronomer-priests to observe the sun, since a small hole carved in another rock crag about 20m to the northeast casts a well-defined point of light onto the centre of the lintel on the morning of June 22, the date of the winter solstice and Aymara New Year. Other stones on the same hill were probably also used for astronomical purposes, although the effects of five centuries of weather and human interference mean that their original function can't now be precisely reconstructed. To reach the Horca del Inca, walk south to the end of Calle Murillo, then follow the dirt path up the hill – the route is marked by arrows painted on rocks.

Just outside town to the southeast, opposite the cemetery about 300m along the road to La Paz, a path to the left leads to **Intinkala**, a collection of large boulders carved with niches, steps, channels and abstract designs. The name means "Seat of the Sun" in Aymara, and it's likely that this site was a religious shrine used for astronomical observations – according to local folk memory a large number of idols were destroyed here in the sixteenth century by Spanish priests as part of their drive to stamp out pagan beliefs. The biggest boulder is carved with a groove shaped like a serpent which was likely used to channel offerings of *chicha* (maize beer) or sacrificial blood – it's believed throughout the Andes that large rocks like these are the home of powerful spirits, like smaller versions of the mountain gods. Some are thought to be petrified members of an earlier race of humans, turned to stone when Viracocha created the sun on Isla del Sol. Along with the Horca del Inca, Intinkala hosts a small gathering of Aymara *yatiris* (traditional priests) to celebrate the winter solstice on the night of June 21–22. Another 200m further along the road out of town in a field on the left are several other carved rocks: one is cut with deep, seat-like niches and known as the **Trono del Inca** (The Inca's Throne) – the niches were perhaps used as ceremonial seats for idols or the mummified remains of long-dead Incas.

About 3km outside town to the northeast is **Kusijata** (a taxi will take you for about $0.40), a small network of well-made Inca agricultural terraces and stone irrigation canals, one of which feeds a pool known as the **Baño del Inca** – possibly a ritual bath, as the name implies. There's also a little museum here with a small collection of ceramics which were excavated at the various Inca sites around Copacabana. Opening hours are very irregular: there's usually someone here at the weekend, but otherwise you may need to ask around the nearby houses to find whoever has the key. Even if you can't get in the museum, the pleasant walk out along the lakeside makes the trip worthwhile. To get there, follow Calle Junín out of town past the bullring, then take the path to the right that cuts across the football pitch; it then joins a track that climbs towards a eucalyptus grove on the hillside – a total walk of about thirty to forty minutes.

Copacabana to Yampupata

Instead of taking a boat directly from Copacabana to Isla del Sol (see opposite), you can follow the trail formerly used by Inca pilgrims by hiking to the tip of the Copacabana peninsula at the village of Yampupata, the closest point on the mainland to the island, and then taking a boat from there. The walk to Yampupata takes about four to five hours, following an easy and very pleasant seventeen-kilometre trail along the shores of Lago Titicaca (for a map of the route, see p.142). Follow Calle Junín out of town to the bullring, then continue along the lakeside road round the shore to the north. The shoreline is usually busy with ducks and wading birds, and the flat, marshy land beside the lake is worked using the ancient system of raised fields called *sukakullos* (see p.119), which use the warmth of water taken from the lake to protect crops from frost and boost production.

Moving on from Copacabana

Buses and **micros** to **La Paz** leave every hour from on and just off Plaza Sucre; tickets should be bought in advance either from the bus conductors on the plaza or from the offices of Flota 2 de Febrero and Flota Manco Capac on Plaza 2 de Febrero. If you want to get to **Sorata** without travelling via La Paz, take a La Paz-bound bus as far as Huarina, where you can flag down a bus to Sorata (3hr; every 30min).

Crossing the Peruvian border

Crossing **into Peru** from Copacabana is easy. Micros to the border at **Kasani**, fifteen minutes away, leave from Plaza Sucre every half-hour or so when full. At Kasani you can get your exit stamp at the passport control (8.30am–7.30pm) and then walk across the border. On the Peruvian side, micros and taxis wait beside the *migración* office to take passengers to the town of **Yunguyo**, a ten-minute ride away; they depart when full. From Yunguyo, regular buses head to **Puno** and on to **Cusco**, and there are several places to stay if you arrive too late to move on. Alternatively, you can catch one of the **tourist buses** which travel to Puno via Copacabana several times a day; tickets are available from travel agencies on Av 6 de Agosto where the buses alight, although they'll cost you around $3.15 without saving much time.

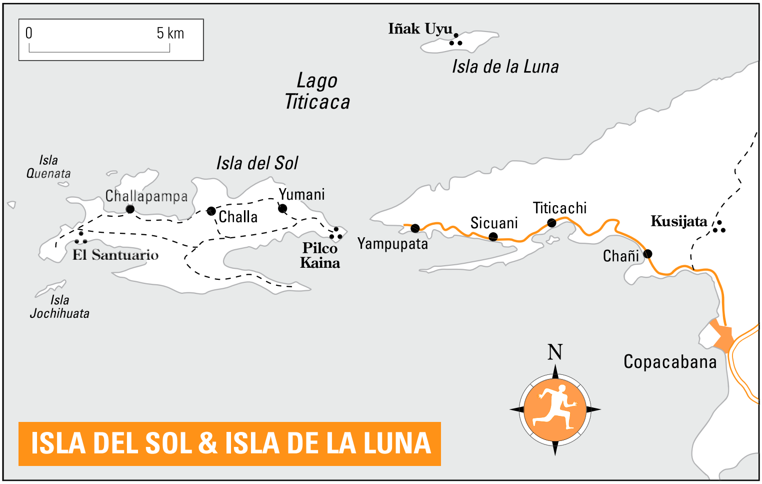
Crossing to Peru via Desaguadero

You can also cross into Peru at **Desaguadero**, on the south side of the lake, a scenic route which is mainly used by lorry drivers heading to the Pacific cost at Ilo. The route is served by regular micros from La Paz, which leave from offices stretched out along Calle Eyzaguirre between Calle Aliaga and Calle Asin in the cemetery district. The frontier crossing is equally straightforward: get your exit stamp from the Bolivian passport control (8.30am–12.30pm & 2–8.45pm), then walk across the bridge over the Río Desaguadero into Peru and get an entry stamp at the Peruvian *migración*. The scruffy Peruvian border town of Desaguadero has some basic places to stay, but again you're better off moving on immediately on one of the frequent buses to Puno (hourly; 3–4hr).

After about an hour the road climbs into the hills overlooking the lake; after another hour you'll see a grotto-like cave on the hillside to your left; now occupied by a statue of the Virgin, it was doubtless also a pre-Christian shrine. The road then climbs gently to a pass before descending, reaching the lakeside hamlet of **Titicachi**, which stands on a perfect horseshoe bay, after about 45 minutes. Another half-hour's walk along the shore brings you to the village of **Sicuani**, where you can spend the night and get a basic meal at the simple *Alojamiento Inca Thaki* (no phone; ③). The owner, the venerable Señor Hilario Quispe, also takes visitors out onto the lake in his traditional *totora* reed boat for around $7.50, and is a mine of information about local customs and beliefs. From Sicuani it's another hour or so to the village of **Yampupata**, where it shouldn't take long to find a boat to take you across to **Yumani** (see p.146) on Isla del Sol. In a rowing boat the trip takes 45 minutes and costs about $2; a motor boat (if you can find one) is obviously faster, but will cost around $7–10 one way.

Isla del Sol

Just off the northern tip of the Copacabana peninsula about 12km northwest of Copacabana, **Isla del Sol** (Island of the Sun) has been attracting visitors for many hundreds of years. Now a quiet rural backwater, in the sixteenth century



ISLA DEL SOL & ISLA DE LA LUNA

the island was one of the most important religious sites in the Andean world, revered as the place where the sun and moon were created and the Inca dynasty was born, and covered in a complex of shrines and temples that attracted thousands of pilgrims. After the Spanish conquest the island became a looting ground for treasure hunters, and the cut stones of its temples were plundered to build churches on the mainland. But five centuries later it's still easy to see why it was (and still is) considered sacred. Surrounded by the azure expanse of Lago Titicaca, with the imperious peaks of the Cordillera Real rising above the shore on the mainland to the east, it's a place of great natural beauty and tranquillity – were it not for the snowy peaks rising beyond the shoreline, the lake could be mistaken for the Mediterranean.

Measuring 21km long and 8km across at its widest point, Isla del Sol is the largest of the forty or so islands in Lago Titicaca and is home to several thousand Aymara campesinos, who still follow a largely traditional lifestyle based on fishing, herding llamas and cultivating the Inca agricultural terraces that contour the island's steep slopes. The three main settlements, **Yumani**, **Challa** and **Challapampa**, are all on the east coast. Scattered with enigmatic ancient ruins and populated by traditional Aymara communities, it's an excellent place to spend some time hiking and contemplating the magnificent scenery.

Visiting the island

You can visit Isla del Sol (along with nearby Isla de la Luna) on a day- or half-day trip from Copacabana, but it's really worth spending at least one night on the island to fully appreciate its serene beauty. The best way to see it is to walk the length of the island from Challapampa in the north to Yumani in the south – a 21-kilometre hike (allow 5–6hrs). At Yumani, you can either catch a boat back to Copacabana immediately, spend the night and return the next morning, or get a boat across to Isla de la Luna (see p.147) or to the mainland at Yampupata (see p.141), from where a seventeen-kilometre trail leads back to Copacabana. You could also do the walk across Isla del Sol the other way around, starting in Yumani and heading north to Challapampa – or simply visit both locations by boat. Basic **accommodation** and food is available in Challapampa, Challa and above all in Yumani, and there are plenty of places to camp.

Full- and half-day boat **tours** to Isla del Sol leave every morning from the beach at the end of Avenida Jaúregui in Copacabana – boats usually depart at either 8.15am or 8.30am, whether for a full day or a half day, with additional half-day boats at 10.30am or 1.30pm. Full-day tours ($2–4) first visit Challa, then Challapampa and Yumani, before returning to Copacabana; Isla de la Luna may also be included in your itinerary if enough passengers want to visit it. If you want to walk across the island, you can get off at Challapampa, walk to Yumani and be picked up in the afternoon or the next day by the same boat; your ticket will still be valid. Alternatively, you can buy a one-way ticket ($1–2)

Isla del Sol and the Incas

The remains of ritual offerings found by archeologists show that Isla del Sol was an important local religious shrine long before the arrival of the Incas. When the island came under Tiwanaku control around 500 AD, larger ritual complexes were built and pilgrimages to the island began. Under **Inca rule**, though, the island was transformed into a religious centre of enormous importance, a pan-Andean pilgrimage destination which was visited every year by thousands of people from the length and breadth of the empire. The Incas believed that the creator god **Viracocha** rose from the waters of Lago Titicaca and called forth the sun and moon from a rock on the island. They also claimed the founding fathers of their own dynasty – **Manco Capac** and **Mama Ocllo** – were brought into being here by Viracocha before travelling north to establish the city of Cusco and spread civilization throughout the Andes. In fact, it's very unlikely the Incas originated on the shores of the lake. This dynastic myth was probably an attempt to add legitimacy to the Inca regime by associating them with Lago Titicaca and the birthplace of the sun – from which the Inca rulers claimed to be directly descended – as well as providing a link with the pre-existing Tiwanaku civilization that was based on the shores of the lake.

After conquering the region in the mid-fifteenth century, the Incas invested heavily in building roads, agricultural terraces, shrines and temples on Isla del Sol, and establishing the town of **Copacabana** as a stop-off point for pilgrims. The entire Copacabana peninsula, as well as the sacred islands, was cleared of its indigenous Lupaqa and Colla population and turned into a restricted sacred area, its original populace being replaced by loyal settlers from elsewhere in the empire, who maintained the places of worship, attended to the needs of the astronomer priests and visiting pilgrims, and cultivated maize for use in elaborate religious rituals. A wall was built across the neck of the peninsula at Yunguyo, with gates where guards controlled access to Copacabana (nearly five centuries later the peninsula is still separated from the rest of the mainland by the border between Peru and Bolivia, which follows almost exactly the same line). Pilgrims entering Copacabana would abstain from salt, meat and chilli and spend several days praying at the complex of shrines here before walking round to the tip of the peninsula at Yampupata, from where they would cross over the water to Isla del Sol.

Part of the island's religious importance was no doubt related to the fertility of its fields. Insulated by the waters of the lake, Isla del Sol enjoys slightly higher average temperatures than the mainland, as a result of which its terraced slopes produce more and better maize than anywhere else in the region. Maize was anyway a sacred crop for the Incas, but that grown on Isla del Sol was especially important. Though most was used to make chicha (maize beer) for use in rituals on the island, grains of maize from the Isla del Sol were distributed across the Inca empire, carried by returning pilgrims who believed that a single grain placed in their stores would ensure bountiful harvests for ever more.

and pay the return fare to any available boat when you want to come back. Half-day tours only give you a brief glimpse of the southern end of the island, and aren't worth doing unless you're really short of time. A multitude of tour agencies – most situated on Av 6 de Agosto – offer trips, as do most of the hotels in town. Unless things are really busy, however, you can just turn up in the morning and buy a ticket for that day; you're likely to end up on the same boat wherever you buy a ticket from. If you want to halve the journey time and get away from the crowds (and the boats can often be disturbingly crowded) there's also the option of private hire. With prices ranging from $30 to well over $100 per day, it's best to shop around the various boats on the beach; prices usually depend on the route – and whether or not you also want to visit Isla de la Luna – rather than the amount of people. Also, to avoid problems, it's best to be absolutely clear about which places are to be included in the itinerary.

Challapampa and the Santuario

The island's northernmost settlement, **CHALLAPAMPA** was founded by the Incas as a service centre for the nearby ceremonial complexes. Set on a narrow spit of land between two large bays on the east coast of the island, the pretty village has a small but interesting **museum** (daily 9am–5.30pm; $1.25) which houses artefacts found both on the island and offshore – underwater archeologists have discovered substantial sites off the coast of Isla del Sol, where offerings were dropped into the water, and tales of lost underwater cities persist to this day. The collection includes some little bronze idols; plenty of carved stones from Inca buildings; Inca and Tiwanaku pottery (including some finely crafted incense-burners shaped like puma heads); and some miniature llama and human figures delicately carved from spondylus shells brought from the Pacific Ocean. You may have to hunt down the attendant to let you into the museum; the ticket also gives admission to the island's other cultural attractions. There are a number of very rustic but friendly **places to stay**: near the dock is the large yellow edifice of *Hostal Inca Uta* (☎02/71515246; ②), which boasts the relative luxury of private baths. Further along among the cluster of houses near the beach are *Hostal Pachamama* (no phone; ②) and *Hostal Cultural* (no phone; ①), the latter of which has some rooms with private bath, and both of which have lounge-friendly, mud-walled gardens with rudimentary washing facilities. The beach area boasts a few basic restaurants with al fresco tables and $2 *almuerzos*.

Kasapata and the Santuario

From Challapampa it's a twenty-minute walk northwest along a steep but easy-to-follow path to the ruins of a substantial Inca site known as **Kasapata**, which was probably a *tambo* (waystation) where pilgrims stayed. It's mostly rubble now, but to the left of the path a large building still stands with five characteristically Incan trapezoidal doorways, while to the north is a large carved stone block that probably had ritual importance.

Another twenty minutes further along the same path is the **Santuario** (9am–5.30pm), the ruined Inca complex built around the sacred rock where the creator god Viracocha is believed to have created the sun and moon. At the height of Inca power the rock was the focal point of a ceremonial complex staffed by hundreds of priests and servants, and at certain times of year thousands of pilgrims, including the Inca himself, would come here to take part in elaborate rituals involving music, dance and sacrifices. Most pilgrims would not even be allowed near the rock, but worshipped from outside the sanctuary wall; those who entered the inner sanctum did so only after passing through a series of doorways where they would undergo cleansing rituals.

The **entrance** to the Santuario is marked by the remnants of a low wall which was probably as close to the sacred rock as most pilgrims were allowed to approach. About 100m beyond the entrance you can make out the rectangular foundations of a series of buildings that housed the priests and servants who attended the temple complex. The path then crosses a bare rock marked by two depressions shaped like giant footprints – dubbed the "Huellas del Sol" ("Footprints of the Sun") – before reaching the centre of the sanctuary. Here stands **Titikala**, the sacred rock from which the Incas believed the sun and moon first rose and after which Lago Titicaca was named, though there's little in the appearance of this large outcrop of weatherbeaten pink sandstone to suggest what an important religious site it once was. During Inca times gold, silver, coca, shells, birds' feathers and sacrificial animals (not to mention the occasional human) were all brought here as offerings to the sun god, Inti, while the rock itself would have been covered in fine cloth and silver and gold plates; in the open space on its southern side was a large stone basin where sacred libations of *chicha* were poured and an altar where sacrifices were made. The winter and summer solstices were probably amongst the most important religious celebrations; on the ridge to the northwest of the rock the point where the sun sets on the June solstice was marked by structures whose foundations can still be made out today. The nearby table made from a massive cut stone slab was recently put together with stones from other ruined buildings as a place for tourists to have picnics.

About 200m beyond Titikala to the northwest is a rambling complex of ruined buildings looking out west across the lake to the Peruvian shore. Known as **La Chincana** (The Labyrinth), this series of interlinked rooms, plazas and passageways with numerous trapezoidal niches and doorways is thought to have been both the storehouse for sacred maize grown on the island and the living quarters for the *mamaconas*, the so-called "Virgins of the Sun", women specially chosen for their beauty and purity who attended the shrine, making *chicha* and weaving cloth for use in rituals. If you have the energy, it's worth walking ten to fifteen minutes up to the peak at the far northern tip of Isla del Sol for panoramic views of the island, the lake, and the majestic peaks of the Illampu massif to the east.

Challapampa to Yumani

Two different paths head from the Santuario towards Yumani at the other end of the island. The first runs directly southeast to Yumani along the bare, uninhabited ridge which bisects the centre of the island, with good views of the coast on both sides. The second returns to Challapampa, from where it continues southeast along the sheltered east coast of the island, passing scattered hamlets and neatly terraced hillsides where maize and potatoes grow. About an hour south of Challapampa on the coastal path you reach **Playa Challa**, a picturesque stretch of sand on a wide bay where the *Qhumphuri Hostel and Restaurant* (no phone; ③) has en-suite rooms and a terrace campfire for travel yarning. Shortly beyond here the path climbs over a headland then drops down again to the village of **CHALLA**, which sits above another calm bay. Close to the waterfront beside the football pitch is a small **museum** (daily 9am–5.30pm; $1.25), set up by the local community to preserve and explain some of their cultural traditions. On display is a collection of intriguing dance costumes decorated with pink flamingo feathers and jaguar skins, as well as elaborate masks and handmade musical instruments. Most boats bringing tourists to Challapampa from Copacabana stop here to see the museum; when they do, the locals sometimes put on costumed folkloric dance performances.

Yumani

From Challa, it's about another two hours' walk southeast to **YUMANI**, the largest village on the island and home to most of its accommodation.

The spectacular views and modest Iglesia de San Antonio aside, Yumani's most characteristic sight is the functional Inca stairway, the **Escalera del Inca**, running steeply down from the village to the lakeshore through a natural amphitheatre covered by some of the finest Inca agricultural terracing on the island, irrigated by bubbling stone canals. The canals are fed by a three-spouted natural spring that's the main source of fresh water for the village. Known as the **Fuente del Inca**, the spring is believed to have magic powers: drink from all three, the locals say, and you'll gain knowledge of the Spanish, Quechua and Aymara languages. At the bottom of the stairway by the beach are the remains of another Inca building, including an unremarkable wall with several niches. Boats from Copacabana dock here on their way to Challapampa and pick up passengers on their way back in the afternoon. There are also usually smaller boats available to take you over to Isla de la Luna and back (about $20–25), or across to the mainland at Yampupata (see p.141), from where you can walk to Copacabana. A short walk around the coast to the south along a path raised on an Inca stone platform brings you to **Pilko Kaina** (9am–5.30pm), the best-preserved Inca site on the island. Set on a cliff about 20m above the lake, the main structure is a large and fairly well-preserved two-storey stone building with classic Inca trapezoidal doorways facing east across the lake to the Isla de la Luna and the mountain peaks beyond – its original function remains obscure. Pilgrims travelling to the Titikala from the mainland would have passed through here after landing at the far southern tip of the island.

Practicalities

Perched on a steep hillside above the lake, the tightly packed thatched houses (and hostels/hotels) are arranged in a labyrinthine street plan that's difficult to find your way around, particularly after dark. The easiest **hotels** to locate are also the most upmarket (and inevitably most expensive), eco-tourism projects developed by the big La Paz based operators in conjunction with the local community: *Albergue Ecológico La Estancia* has a growing collection of delightful traditional-style, thatched-roof cottages – arranged on terraces and connected by cobbled paths – with solar electricity, heated water, built-in beds and fantastic views over the lake, as well as a decent restaurant; the price includes dinner on arrival and full buffet breakfast the following morning. Bookings must be made in advance through Magri Turismo (☎02/2442727; ⑦) in La Paz. *La Posada del Inca* is cloistered within a leafier setting and a more traditional layout. Rooms are very much rustic-chic with log-supported beds, varnished brick floors and vintage bedside lamps, as well as electric blankets and solar-powered showers. If you want to stay here, though, you'll have to sign on with one of Crillon Tours' various packages (see p.132).

If you're travelling independently, one of the most comfortable, accessible options is the sprawling *Hosteria Las Islas* (☎02/71939047; ④), near the church. A pastel colour scheme, sanded floors and handsome views make for great value, while the restaurant offers a lofty, flowery terrace to enjoy their freshly caught trout, pejerrey and inclusive breakfast. Roughly opposite, on the left-hand side of the steps, is the revamped *Hostal Imperio del Sol* (no phone; ⑤), with clean, spartan rooms and a pet llama in the patio. Both places also offer cheaper rooms with shared toilet for around $5–6. Also in view of the church, *Hostal Inti Wayra* (☎02/71942015; ④) is another decent choice with spacious, balconied rooms, natural decor and excellent east-facing lake views. Those of

▲ Sailing on Lago Titicaca

a spiritual bent can avail themselves of the meditation room, and the restaurant includes several veggie options. *Hostal Puerta del Sol* (no phone; ④), at the top of the main street on the left, has equally fantastic views to the west side of the lake from balconied, private-bath rooms. An inclusive American breakfast is served in a rustic little dining room with bamboo walls and log tables. Those with both a budget and energy to spare can try either the *Hostal Palacio del Inca* (no phone; ④–⑥), a large, ochre-painted faux-colonial affair with clean, basic, sanded-floor rooms off a balustraded balcony, with or without private bath (the only catch is no shower), or, at the very top of the ridge, *Hostal Templo del Sol*, with basic rooms sharing a couple of toilets and one shower, and a *comedor* with great views to either side of the island. Also right at the top but well worth the hike is the brand-new 🏃 *Hostal Inti Kala* (Ⓣ02/71944013, Ⓔjavierintikala@hotmail.com; ④–⑥), a handsome stone and wood construction with huge windows, winding balconies and a spacious terrace with incredible views, as well as some of the most stylish en-suite bathrooms on the island.

Most of the village's hotels and hostels have in-house **restaurants** serving pizza, pasta and the ubiquitous Titicaca trout, although prices tend to be higher than Copacabana due to the limited availability of water and the difficulty in transporting it. There are also usually a few tables set up down on the dock for hungry arrivals, with profits going to the local community.

Isla de la Luna

About 8km west of Isla del Sol, far smaller **Isla de la Luna** (Island of the Moon) was another important pre-conquest religious site. Made up of a single ridge 3km long and just over 1km across at its widest point, the island has limited agricultural land and is home to a small community – for much of the twentieth century the island was used as a prison for political detainees. For the Incas, however, it was a site of great spiritual importance. Known as Coati ("Queen Island"), it was associated with the moon, considered the female counterpart of the sun, and a powerful deity in her own right. Many pilgrims would continue here after their visit to the Santuario on Isla del Sol.

The secrets of the stars

Anyone who sees the night sky from the Altiplano, away from major settlements when the weather is clear and before the moon has risen, can't fail to be impressed by the bright canopy of the southern sky. It's no surprise that the Incas were fascinated by the stars, using their comparatively advanced astronomical understanding to forecast agricultural cycles and future climatic events. What is surprising, however, is that nearly five centuries after Inca civilization was destroyed by the Spanish conquest, their astronomical knowledge is still being used by Quechua and Aymara campesinos in the Andes of both Peru and Bolivia. In June of each year the campesinos observe the **Pleiades** – a group of stars sacred to the Incas. If the eleven-star cluster appears bright and clear in the pre-dawn sky, they anticipate early, abundant rains and a bountiful potato harvest. If the stars appear dim, however, they expect a poor harvest and delay planting to reduce the adverse effects of late and meagre rains. This practice was long considered simply a superstitious peasant tradition, at least until 1999, when a team of anthropologists and astronomers from the US discovered that using this method the campesinos were accurately forecasting the arrival of **El Niño**, a periodic change in Pacific Ocean currents that occurs every two to seven years, triggering changes in global weather patterns, including drought in the Andes. The scientists found that in El Niño years, high-altitude clouds form which are invisible to the naked eye but which are sufficient to decrease the brightness of the stars. Thus, by using a traditional folk technique, Andean campesinos accurately predict the onset of El Niño, a capability modern science achieved less than twenty years ago.

The main site on the island – and one of the best-preserved Inca complexes in Bolivia – is a temple on the east coast known as **Iñak Uyu** (9am–5.30pm; $0.80), the "Court of Women", which was probably a temple dedicated to the moon and staffed entirely by women; it takes about an hour to reach by boat from Yumani on Isla del Sol. From the beach a series of broad Inca agricultural terraces lead up to the temple complex, stone buildings facing inwards from three sides onto a broad central plaza. The façades of the buildings contain eleven massive external niches over 4m high and 1.5m deep, still covered in mud stucco, and decorated with smaller niches with a stepped diamond motif more characteristic of the Tiwanaku Inca architectural style – the Inca builders may have incorporated this design to please local sensibilities. Colonial-era materials including finely made textiles have been found buried here, suggesting that ritual offerings were still being made long after the fall of the Incas.

Achacachi and the northern shore

From Huarina, on the road between La Paz and Copacabana, a side road heads northeast to the town of **ACHACACHI** and beyond, to the northeastern shore of the lake and the remote Cordillera Apolobamba (see p.158). The bustling market centre for a densely populated rural hinterland, Achacachi has long been infamous within Bolivia as a centre of Aymara discontent. Many non-Aymara Bolivians are afraid to come here, and though the lurid tales you may hear of anthropophagous Aymaras should be ignored, this is no place to linger long if you're an outsider – there have been serious outbreaks of violence and incidents of torture and murder here in the not too distant past, and there remains a good deal of animosity towards foreigners. The focus of major uprisings throughout the colonial and republican periods, in recent decades Achacachi and the surrounding province of Umasuyos have been at the centre of an increasingly radical Aymara nationalist movement. In 2000 and 2001, and again during the "gas war" of 2003–05, peasant leaders from the region were at the forefront of a campaign of road blockades in pursuit of a broad range of political demands, including land grants and farming credit, the abandonment of neo-liberal economic policies and coca-eradication, and the establishment of an independent Aymara Republic, driving out from town all symbols of the Bolivian state: there are no magistrates or banks, the police station is a burnt-out shell and the local government has been replaced by Aymara leaders. The only official presence now is the army, and even they rarely stray from their fortress-like barracks at the north end of town. Achacachi was back in the headlines in early 2007 with Evo Morales' attendance at a rally of radical indigenous group the *Ponchos Rojos*. There are a few simple places to stay here and some pretty good traditional restaurants on and around the main plaza, but really you should move through Achacachi as quickly as possible.

From Achacachi the unpaved road northeast continues along the marshy fringes of Lago Titicaca through a series of small Aymara market towns and villages. At **Escoma**, 75km from Achacachi, there's a police post where your documents will be checked. Here the road forks. One branch climbs north towards the Cordillera Apolobamba, while the other continues 25km northeast to **Puerto Acosta**, the last town on the Bolivian side of the lake. To cross the border here you'll need to have obtained an exit stamp from the immigration office in La Paz (see p.112) first, and even then you may well have problems getting an entry stamp in Peru, not to mention finding transport round the remote northern fringe of the lake to Juliaca, the nearest major town on the Peruvian side. Given these administrative and logistical difficulties, crossing at either Kasani (p.141) or Desaguadero (p.141) will save you a lot of time and energy.

The Cordillera Real

Stretching for about 160km along the northeastern edge of the Altiplano, the **Cordillera Real** – the "Royal Range" – is the loftiest and most dramatic section of the Cordillera Oriental in Bolivia. With six peaks over 6000m high and many more over 5000m, it forms a jagged wall of soaring, ice-bound peaks that separates the Altiplano from the tropical lowlands of the Amazon basin. Easily accessible from La Paz, the mountains are perfect for climbing and trekking – indeed, spending a few days walking above the tree line amongst the lofty peaks or down the steep eastern slopes into the tropical valleys of the Yungas (see p.164) is the only way to really appreciate the overwhelming splendour of the Andean landscape. Populated by isolated Aymara communities who cultivate the lower slopes and valleys and raise llamas and alpacas on the high pastures, the cordillera is a largely pristine natural environment. The mighty Andean condor is still a common sight, circling on thermal currents above deep ravines or nesting amongst lonely mountain spires, and other birds like eagles, caracaras and hawks are also frequently seen. Though rarely spotted, pumas still prowl the upper reaches, while the elusive Andean spectacled bear roams the high cloudforest that fringes the mountains' upper eastern slopes.

Trekking and climbing in the Cordillera Real

The easiest base from which to explore the Cordillera Real is **La Paz**. Many of the best and most popular treks start close to the city, including the three so-called "Inca trails" which cross the cordillera, connecting the Altiplano with the warm, forested valleys of the Yungas (see p.164). Two of these ancient paved routes – the **Choro Trail** (see p.166) and the **Takesi Trail** (see p.151) – are relatively easy to follow without a guide; the third, the **Yunga Cruz Trail** (see p.152), is more difficult. You can do all three of these treks, as well as many other more challenging routes, with any of the adventure tour agencies based in La Paz (see p.114).

The other major base for trekking is the small town of **Sorata**, nestled in a valley at the north end of the range at the foot of the mighty Illampu massif. From here, numerous trekking routes take you high up amongst the glacial peaks, while others plunge down into the remote forested valleys of the Yungas. Local campesinos in Sorata have organized a couple of cooperatives which provide trekking guides, mules and porters, making organizing your own trip easier and cheaper than going with a La Paz tour operator. Further afield, the remote and beautiful **Cordillera Apolobamba** (see p.158), a separate range of the Cordillera Oriental north of Lago Titicaca with almost no tourist infrastructure, also offers excellent trekking possibilities for the more adventurous traveller.

Unless you're going on a fully organized trip with a tour agency you'll need all your own **camping equipment**, including a tent, sleeping bag, warm and waterproof clothing, and cooking stove and fuel. If you're an experienced hiker, able to communicate effectively with local campesinos in Spanish (though many locals speak only Aymara) and have maps, detailed directions and a compass and/or GPS, you can try doing some of these treks without a guide. The books *Trekking in Bolivia: a Traveller's Guide*, by Yossi Brain, and *Peru and Bolivia: Backpacking and Trekking*, by Hilary Bradt, both have detailed descriptions of many of the trekking routes and are usually available in La Paz bookshops, as well as in the UK and US. Most of the routes are also covered in the excellent *Cordillera Real Recreation Map*, published in the US by O'Brien Cartographics, while the Instituto de Geográfico Militar in La Paz (see p.111) sells larger-scale maps that cover some of the routes.

Rather than setting off on your own, it's much better to go with a **local guide**. Getting lost in this remote region is easy and can be very dangerous, and rescue services are pretty much nonexistent. As well as making sure you don't get lost, a local guide can help avoid any possible misunderstandings with the communities you pass through. Hiring a guide is also a good way to ensure local people see some economic benefit from tourism. You may also want to hire a mule to carry your pack, either for your entire trip or for that first gruelling ascent to a high pass. Whatever you do, don't go trekking in these mountains alone, as the consequences of a minor fall or a twisted ankle can quickly prove disastrous if there's no one around to help.

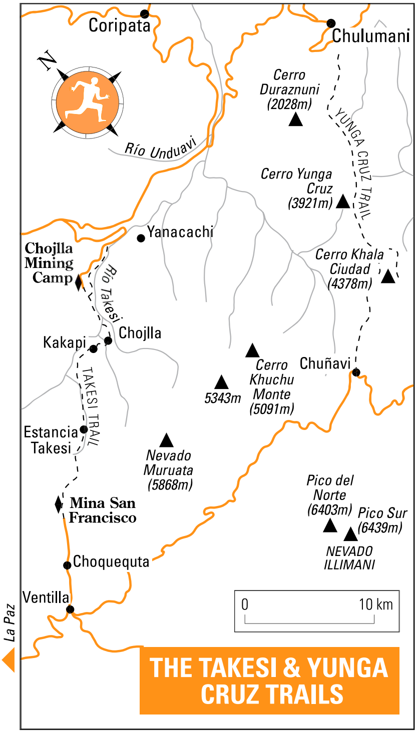
With so many high peaks, the Cordillera Real is obviously an excellent place for **mountain climbing**. While serious climbers should bring all their own equipment from home, inexperienced climbers can also scale some of these high peaks with help from specialist agencies in La Paz (see p.114). **Huayna Potosí** (6090m), near La Paz, is one of the few peaks in South America over 6000m that can be climbed by people with no mountaineering experience. Agencies in La Paz will take you up it for around $120 per person, though you should check carefully that the guide they provide is qualified and experienced and the equipment adequate – if in doubt, go with a more reputable and expensive agency.

To locals, the high mountain peaks are more than just breathtaking natural phenomena. Known as *achachilas* in Aymara and *apus* in Quechua, they're also considered living beings inhabited by powerful spirits that exert a strong influence over human affairs. As controllers of weather and the source of vital irrigation water, these mountain gods must be appeased with constant offerings and worship, since if angered they're liable to send hailstorms, frost or drought to destroy crops. At almost every high pass you'll see stone cairns known as **apachetas**. As well as marking the pass on the horizon to make it easier for travellers to find, these *apachetas* are also shrines to the mountain gods. Travellers carry stones up to the pass to add to the *apacheta*, thereby securing the good will of the *achachilas* and leaving the burden of their worries behind. Offerings of coca and alcohol are also made at these shrines, which vary in size and form from jumbled heaps of rocks to neatly built piles topped by a cross, depending on the importance of the route and the relative power and visibility of the nearby peaks.

The Takesi Trail

One of the best and most popular treks in Bolivia is the **Takesi Trail**, a fantastic two- to three-day, forty-kilometre hike starting near La Paz that crosses the Cordillera Real and plunges down into the steamy forested valleys of the Yungas, emerging at the village of Yanacachi, west of Chulumani on the road from La Paz. Also known as the Camino del Inca – the Inca Trail – the Takesi is one of the finest remaining pre-Columbian paved roads in Bolivia, and passes through an amazing variety of scenery. Relatively easy to follow and not too strenuous, it's an ideal hike for less experienced trekkers and can be done without a guide; it's also the fastest and easiest way to descend from the highlands to the Yungas on foot. Basic meals and foodstuffs are available in the main villages, although it's advisable to carry at least some of your own supplies.

The Takesi Trail starts at **Ventilla**, a small village set at an altitude of 3200m some 20km east of La Paz. Buses to Ventilla (3hr) depart every morning at about 8am from the corner of Luis Lara with Rodriguez in La Paz; alternatively, a long-distance taxi should cost around $30. From Ventilla, turn left off the main road and follow the clearly signposted track that winds up the valley northeast to the village of **Choquequta**, ninety minutes away. Here you can usually hire mules for the ascent to the pass


Coripata
Chulumani
N
Cerro Duraznuni (2028m)
Río Unduavi
YUNGA CRUZ TRAIL
Cerro Yunga Cruz (3921m)
Yanacachi
Chojlla Mining Camp
Río Takesi
Cerro Khala Ciudad (4378m)
Chojlla
Kakapi
Cerro Khuchu Monte (5091m)
Chuñavi
5343m
TAKESI TRAIL
Estancia Takesi
Nevado Muruata (5868m)
Pico del Norte (6403m)
Pico Sur (6439m)
Mina San Francisco
NEVADO ILLIMANI
Choquequta
Ventilla
0
10 km
La Paz

THE TAKESI & YUNGA CRUZ TRAILS

or the entire length of the trek. Follow the track uphill for another ninety minutes until you reach a crumbling wall with a map of the route painted on it. Turn off the road to the right along a broad path which winds steeply uphill, with fine pre-Columbian paving soon evident along its length. After ninety minutes or so you reach the highest point on the trail, a 4600-metre pass marked by a stone *apacheta* from where there are fantastic views of the looming glacial peak of Mururata (5868m) to the east. From the pass, the trail continues about ninety minutes northeast down a broad valley through llama pastures to the herding hamlet of **Estancia Takesi**, passing an abundance of good camping spots along the way.

Below Estancia Takesi, the path crosses the Río Takesi onto the right bank, where it winds along steep slopes high above a thundering gorge. The air gets warmer and more humid by the minute as the trail drops below 3000m, and the sides of the valley are soon covered in lush vegetation. After two to three hours you'll reach the village of **Kakapi**, after which the path again crosses a river, now heading east. Continue uphill for half an hour to **Chojila**, a small and friendly settlement where enterprising locals have terraced some ground to create a campsite with gorgeous views over the lush subtropical valleys below. It's still over three hours from here to Yanacachi, so if you're not in a hurry, it's the perfect place to stay overnight.

From Chojila, descend for 45 minutes until you reach a concrete bridge; cross it and turn to the right. After a while, you'll reach an aqueduct, which leads straight to a road. Be careful if you're following the aqueduct in the dark – there are holes in the concrete slabs underfoot. When you reach the road, follow it around the bend and take the left, uphill fork. Soon, the road passes the unpleasant sulphur mining camp of **Chojlla**. Unless you get a lift from a passing vehicle, you'll have to follow the road another two hours to get to the tranquil village of **Yanacachi**, just off the La Paz–Chulumani road, which is a pleasant spot to rest after the trek, and has several basic *alojamientos* and places to eat. A bus leaves for La Paz early each morning; buy a ticket from the driver the night before to be sure of getting a seat. Otherwise, you can walk to the main road in about an hour, and then flag down buses travelling in either direction between Chulumani and La Paz (hourly).

The Yunga Cruz Trail

Connecting Chuñavi, at the foot of the mighty Mount Illimani, with Chulumani in the Yungas (see p.174), the **Yunga Cruz Trail** (3–4 days) is at once the toughest, most scenic and most pristine of the three Inca trails which link the Altiplano with the tropical valleys. Instead of following a river, like most Bolivian trails, the path leads along the spine of a giant ridge nearly all the way, giving trekkers a condor's-eye view of the dramatic landscape. Water is scarce along much of the route and the weather unpredictable, with heavy rain a possibility even during the dry season: carry at least two one-litre water bottles per person and take waterproof clothing. Route-finding is fairly difficult, so ideally go with a guide, and take a machete, as stretches of the trail may be overgrown. The trail starts in **Chuñavi**, a small village on the northeast slopes of Mount Illimani, six hours by road from La Paz – a micro leaves several days a week from Calle Burgoa in the San Pedro neighbourhood in La Paz. Take a taxi to be sure of finding the right micro, and turn up early to ensure you get a ticket.

From Chuñavi a path heads east to a small lake about ninety minutes away, before curving left along a broad ridge with plenty of decent places to camp, but no good source of water. The path then continues for about two hours

Ancient beliefs and modern mysticism

About ninety percent of Bolivians are Roman Catholic, the faith introduced by Spanish conquerors and missionaries in the sixteenth century. In daily life, however, most combine Catholicism with the practice of indigenous religious beliefs dating back many centuries before the arrival of Christianity. The Quechua and Aymara people of the Andes see themselves as inhabiting a supernatural universe in which every natural entity – from people and animals to plants, mountains and the earth itself – are powerful spiritual beings intertwined in a complex network of mutual obligation.

Pachamama and the mountain gods

▲ Making an offering to Pachamama

At the heart of indigenous religious belief is the Andean landscape. The high snow-capped peaks are considered powerful deities, known as **achachilas**, which control the climate, providing the seasonal rains on which agriculture depends. But they can also bring drought, snow, hail and sudden frosts that can destroy crops and kill livestock. As such, they must be honoured and rewarded with regular offerings of coca and alcohol to appease their hunger. The earth is **Pachamama**, a powerful female deity that is the source of all life and fertility. Pachamama is more than just a benign goddess, though – she can be hungry and aggressive as well as nurturing and protective, and must be placated with regular libations if fertility is to be maintained and calamity averted.

▲ Yatiri performing a ritual ceremony

Yatiris

Ritual ceremonies are conducted by traditional Aymara priests known as **Yatiris** – "someone who knows". Some are born into the role, but most are chosen by nature itself, quite literally by being struck by lightning (a not uncommon occurrence in the high Andes). *Yatiris* act as intermediaries with the spirit world, maintaining the vital reciprocal relationship between humans and nature by making offerings known as **misas**, an elaborate combination of coca, alcohol, agricultural produce or ritual items such as dried llama foetuses – which are then buried or burned. *Yatiris* also read coca leaves to predict the future and diagnose and treat the spiritual problems considered the cause of most illnesses and to counter the black magic that is also blamed for many ailments. At the Aymara New Year on June 21, *Yatiris* from across the Altiplano gather at the ancient ruined city of Tiwanaku to perform mass ceremonies, ensuring the well being for the entire Aymara people for the upcoming year.

Devils and the underworld

The Aymara conceive the universe as being divided into three distinct worlds, each intersecting and existing concurrently in time and space: the upper world, **alax pacha**, home to the moon, sun and stars, the creator God and the Christian saints: the middle world, **aka pacha** where people live; and the underworld, **manqha pacha**, which is inhabited by dangerous spirits and devils known as **saxras** or **supays**. At certain times of the year, particularly at Carnaval, these devils are believed to walk the earth, and it is considered dangerous to travel alone.

▲ Devil mask at Carnaval

Mysticism in the city

Traditional Aymara religion has taken on new forms among those who have migrated from the country to La Paz, El Alto and other cities. There, offerings are made not for the fertility of herds and animals but for success in business and the accumulation of money. At **Carnaval** time, houses, vehicles and commercial premises are regularly sprayed with libations of beer to ensure prosperity in the year ahead.

The greatest manifestation of this capitalist mysticism is seen every January at the Alasitas fiesta in La Paz, at the heart of which is the diminutive household god of abundance, **Ekeko** (see p.97).

▲ Ekeko at the Alasitas fiesta

▲ Oruro Carnaval dancer

Remote mountain regions are also frequented by other malign supernatural beings, such as **condenados**, the souls of the dead who cannot rest in peace because of some grave crime committed and are condemned to haunt the earth. Travellers at dusk must also beware of the **kharisiri**, an evil white man who – in a clear allegory of colonial oppression – steals fat from the bodies of his victims to oil the machinery of foreign capitalism or even to fuel the space shuttle.

People who work in the mines are at particular risk from the denizens of the Underworld. The metal the miners extract is believed to belong to the devil, and as such he must be rewarded if disaster is to be averted and the wealth of the mineral veins maintained. In every mine there is a statue of a devil known as **El Tío** (see p.219) whose insatiable appetite must be appeased with regular offerings of coca, alcohol, tobacco and blood.

Blood sacrifice

At times of crisis or when the earth is disturbed by the building of a new house or road, a more substantial **sacrifice** is required to keep spirits of the natural world appeased and equilibrium restored. An animal – usually a llama – is ritually slaughtered, its blood spread over the new construction and its heart burned or buried in the foundations. In some extreme cases, even that may not be enough: rumours persist that human sacrifices are still sometimes carried out, with the victim usually someone from outside the community who has committed a grave offence.

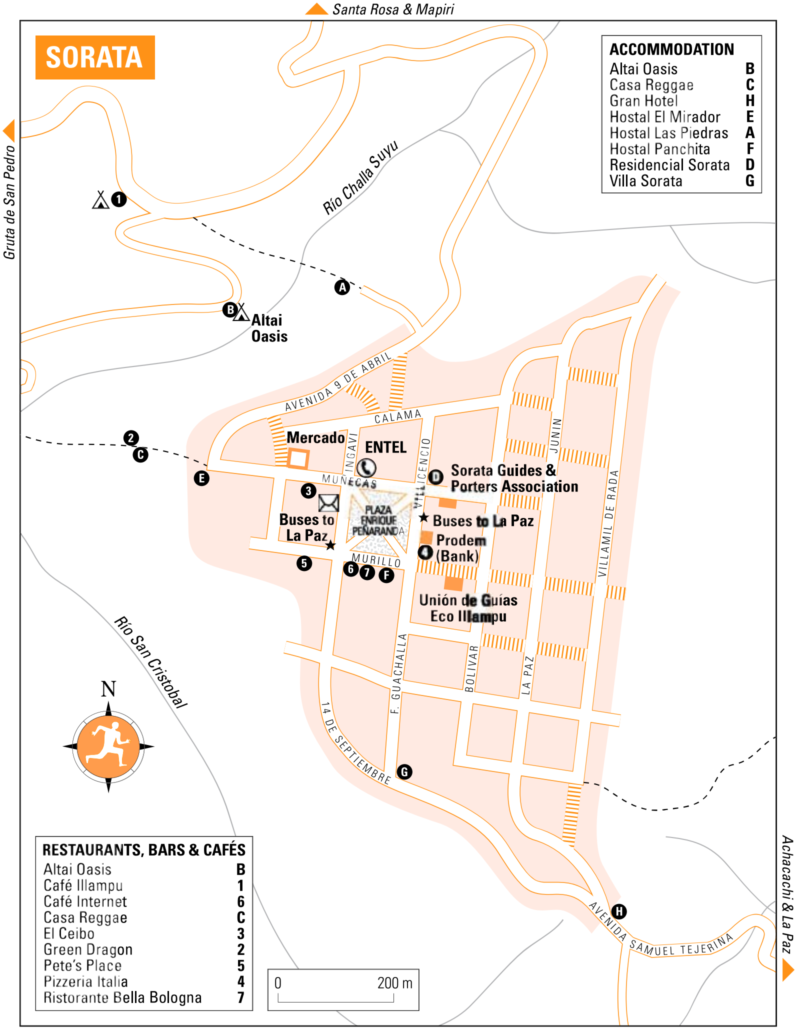
along the ridge and around the side of the 4378-metre **Cerro Khala Ciudad** (Stone City Mountain) – look out for the condors that nest amidst its soaring towers. After a sharp turn to the right, the Inca stonework suddenly stops and Illimani disappears from view. Look out for the faded white arrow painted on the rock and turn uphill – after a few big steps, you should be climbing an impressive stone staircase. Another two hours further on, the path curves to the right, leading along the top of a broad green valley. Half an hour later, a stream crosses the path. Fill up with enough water for the night and continue for another hour until you reach a soggy campsite, just below the summit of Cerro Yunga Cruz, the last place to pitch a tent for several hours.

Soon after leaving the campsite, the trail is crossed by a stream which is the last reliable water source before Chulumani. From here, the trail descends some 2000m through dense cloudforest. After two hours, the trail splits in two; take the right fork. Half an hour later, you'll reach a clearing. Go to the end of it, then turn right, leaving the peak of Cerro Duraznuni behind you to the left. **Chulumani** should be visible in the distance to the northeast, perched on the edge of the ridge across the valley on your left. From here it's another three to four hours to the main road just southeast of Chulumani, past deforested hillsides patchworked with bright-green coca plantations.

Sorata and around

Some 55km north of Achacachi, enclosed in a deep, fertile valley, patchworked with green fields at the foot of the mighty 6400-metre Illampu massif, **SORATA** has without a doubt the most beautiful setting of any town in Bolivia. Hemmed in on all sides by steep mountain slopes and often shrouded in cloud, it has a real Shangri-la feel – the contrast with the harsh Altiplano is so striking that early Spanish explorers compared the valley to the Garden of Eden. Set at an altitude of 2695m, it also enjoys a significantly warmer climate than La Paz, but is still cool and fresh at night compared to the Yungas.

During the colonial era Sorata was an important trade and gold-mining centre with a large Spanish population. In 1781, during the Great Rebellion, it was successfully besieged by supporters of the neo-Inca rebel Tupac Amaru, who dammed rivers above Sorata and then released a torrent that swept the town away. During the republican era Sorata enjoyed considerable prosperity as one of the main routes into the Yungas from the Altiplano: travellers heading towards the Amazon from La Paz would pass through here before descending along the tortuous trails down to Mapiri in the Yungas, from where they would continue down to Rurrenabaque and beyond by canoe. Mule trains loaded with precious cargoes of quinine, coca and rubber flowed the other way, generating fortunes for the German merchants who dominated the town in the nineteenth century. Though you can still travel down to Mapiri on foot or by road, Sorata was bypassed as a major route into the lowlands in the 1930s with the construction of the Yungas road from La Paz. It was back in the headlines in 2003, when local solidarity with the El Alto-centred "gas war" resulted in several deaths, a tragedy in more ways than one, with its popularity as a peaceful and enchanting base for trekking and climbing in the Cordillera Real understandably dented. Today, though, it's once again as peaceful and as enchanting as ever, and, with the imminent completion of long-awaited road improvements significantly cutting the journey time to La Paz, it's surely only a matter of time before its former popularity is restored.


SORATA
Santa Rosa & Mapiri
Gruta de San Pedro
Achacachi & La Paz
Río Challa Suyu
Río San Cristobal
Altai Oasis
Mercado
ENTEL
Sorata Guides & Porters Association
Buses to La Paz
Buses to La Paz
Prodem (Bank)
Unión de Guías Eco Illampu
PLAZA ENRIQUE PEÑARANDA
AVENIDA 9 DE ABRIL
CALAMA
INGAVI
MUÑECAS
VILLICENCIO
JUNIN
VILLAMIL DE RADA
MURILLO
F. GUACHALLA
BOLIVAR
LA PAZ
14 DE SEPTIEMBRE
AVENIDA SAMUEL TEJERINA
N
0 200 m
ACCOMMODATION
Altai Oasis B
Casa Reggae C
Gran Hotel H
Hostal El Mirador E
Hostal Las Piedras A
Hostal Panchita F
Residencial Sorata D
Villa Sorata G
RESTAURANTS, BARS & CAFÉS
Altai Oasis B
Café Illampu 1
Café Internet 6
Casa Reggae C
El Ceibo 3
Green Dragon 2
Pete's Place 5
Pizzeria Italia 4
Ristorante Bella Bologna 7
A
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Arrival and information

Buses from La Paz pull up in front of the two bus company offices, Trans Unificada Sorata and Trans Larecaja, on the Plaza Enrique Peñaranda, the main square. Sorata has no formal tourist office, but there are several different places where you can get good **information** and advice on trekking in the surrounding mountains. The Sorata Guides and Porters Association, just off the plaza on Calle Sucre, is the principal centre of local know-how, while staff at the *Andean Biking Co-Op* (see p.157) and the manager of the *Residencial Sorata* are experts on the region and can usually be persuaded to share some of their knowledge and experience. The youthful *dueño* of *Casa Reggae* also organises trekking and horse riding.

Almost all the other facilities you'll need are concentrated on or near Plaza Enrique Peñaranda: the **post office** is on the plaza itself, as is the **ENTEL** office on Calle Muñecas; you can also make long-distance calls from booths inside the *Hostal Panchita* on the plaza. **Internet** access is available at *Café Internet* on the south side of the plaza; although Internet connections are erratic at present, things should – at least in theory – speed up with the completion of the new road. There are no ATMs in Sorata, although Prodem, also on the plaza, will advance cash or change money at their usual prohibitive rates.

Accommodation

Nowhere in Bolivia is there such a range of atmospheric, imaginative and eccentric **places to stay** concentrated in such a small area. There's not too much in the way of conventional upscale comfort, although inevitably that's likely to change with the completion of the new road. There are also two good **campsites** outside town (about $2 per person per night): the campsite at the *Café Illampu* is fifteen to twenty minutes' walk across the valley on the road leading to the Gruta de San Pedro; *Altai Oasis* is slightly closer to town, down by the river. Both are well equipped with hot showers, cafés, fireplaces and hammocks.

Altai Oasis Ten minutes from town on the road to the Gruta ⓣ02/71519856, ⓦwww.altaioasis.lobopage.com. Kitted out in beard and Kathmandu T-shirt, the sage, supremely chilled Johny Resnikowski presides over this charming retreat like a Bolivian Jerry Garcia. He and partner Roxana have expanded on the original campsite, constructing a series of imaginative cabins among the wild anis, pine and eucalyptus folds of the riverbank. A psychedelic log cabin, a tree-house-like hideaway, a conical yurt-like construction, as well as more humble abodes; all have been conceived with real love and dedication. Each is exquisitely rustic – stone skirting, slate floors, thatched roofs – without sacrificing creature comforts. Prices range from $2–15 per person, depending on the cabin and size of group.

Casa Reggae One block west of *Hostal El Mirador* ⓣ02/71994337. Hugely popular, Bolivian-run travellers' hangout with bargain-basement dorm accommodation (①), a small bar and plenty of rustic lounging space with ad hoc live music. The friendly owner also runs horse-riding treks for $13 per person.

Gran Hotel Ex-Prefectural Av Samuel Tejerina ⓣ02/2895003. Like a miniature, majestically dilapidated version of the Outlook Hotel in *The Shining*, this place is an experience in itself. Built in the mid-1940s and long since gone to seed, it's not difficult to imagine ghosts stalking every endless, Gothic chandelier-lined corridor, peering through stained-glass windows. The old bar looks to have a stool reserved for Jack Nicholson, while the games room looks barely changed from the days when smoking jackets were *de rigueur*. The staff is friendly if barely visible, and if you come during the week you'll likely have the place to yourself, with a pick of clean, characterful rooms, some of which have recently been redone, most of which have comfy old beds and many of which enjoy inspirational views. You can even camp in the unkempt, overgrown gardens ($2 per person), although the resident DJ might get a bit wearing. At the time of writing, the owners were due to open a brand-new hotel, *La Mansion*, nearby. ③

Hostal El Mirador Calle Muñecas 400 ⓣ02/2898503. Decent Hostelling International affiliate with small, clean functional rooms with or without bath, a pleasant terrace and unbeatable views across the valley. ①

Hostal Las Piedras Villa Elisa Calle 2, above the football field on the shortcut to the Gruta ⓣ02/71916341. Peaceful and homely, the German-run *Las Piedras* offers spotless, great-value, great-view rooms (with or without bath) named after precious stones and styled with a creative dedication and attention to detail rare at budget level. Friendly proprietress Petra Huber is a mine of local information in three languages (German, English and Spanish), while her partner – owner of *Café Illampu* – supplies artesan breads, yoghurt, honey and marmalade. ②

Hostal Panchita Plaza Enrique Peñaranda ⓣ02/2134242. Friendly and central establishment whose small, clean, orange-pastel rooms (with or without bath) are arranged around a small courtyard, the ones at the front boasting small balconies overlooking the plaza. There's also a garage and free kitchen facilities. ②

Residencial Sorata Plaza Enrique Peñaranda Ⓣ&Ⓕ02/2136672, Ⓔresorata@entelnet.bo. Set in the delightful, rambling, nineteenth-century Casa Gunther, this a trip even further back in time than the *Ex-Prefectural* – 130 years to be exact. A warren of ancient, dusky rooms meditates under looming ceilings and metre-thick walls, heavy with age, while outside a series of overgrown, flower-filled courtyards buzzes with hummingbirds. A number of newer rooms come with private bath but their relative anonymity can't match the charm of the older quarters. There's also a restaurant, a bamboo-skirted video lounge and leafy garage space. The helpful French-Canadian manager Louis Demers is also a good source of trekking information. ①–②

Villa Sorata Fernando Guachalla and 14 de Septiembre Ⓣ02/22135241. Another colonial gem, located down at the southern edge of town. Views are perhaps not as spectacular as some in town, but the rooms are simple and calming, set around a lovely garden. A handsome slate floor makes room no. 3 desirable, although the 4-bed, beam-ceilinged room on the upper storey is the brightest and freshest. There's the usual choice of private or shared bath as well as the option of weekly rental. ②

The Town

Though there's not a lot to do in Sorata itself, it's a great place to hang out and relax while preparing for or recovering from some hard trekking or climbing, as well as a good base for less strenuous walks in the surrounding countryside. Built on a steep hillside, the town's narrow cobbled streets are lined with crumbling old houses with red-tiled roofs and overhanging balconies. The heart of town is the ample **Plaza General Enrique Peñaranda**, shaded by massive palm trees and with good views of Mount Illampu, the looming glacial peak that dominates the town to the southeast – the square is named after the former military president whose statue stands at its centre. Inside the municipal offices on the west side of the square is a one-room **museum** (currently closed for restoration), with a rather paltry collection of pre-Columbian pots from nearby burial sites and some ornate old dance costumes. The most interesting building is the **Casa Gunther**, on the plaza's northeast corner, a massive, rambling nineteenth-century mansion that was once home to a family of powerful German merchants, and which now houses the *Residencial Sorata*.

Eating and drinking

Sorata's sporadic popularity with foreign trekkers and climbers is at least reflected in the range of **food** on offer. As well as standard and inexpensive Bolivian eateries, there are also one or two very good places, catering mainly to tourists, where you can find exotic dishes like pizza and vegetarian food. For early breakfasts, fresh fruit juices and cheap soups, try the **market** just off the plaza on Muñecas.

Altai Oasis Plaza Enrique Peñaranda Ⓣ71519856. To the peal of wind chimes and distant rattle of campground bongos, you can dine on Altai's idyllic outdoor restaurant deck. It's one of the best places to eat in town, with great omelettes, guacamole and soya burgers for vegetarians, and Hungarian goulash and Polish Borsht for everyone else, as well as a wide range of breakfast choices, all served in a warm and welcoming atmosphere. Look out for the nifty, log-carved board games.

Café Illampu On the road to the Gruta San Pedro, a 15–20-minute walk out of town. Friendly open-air café on the mountainside looking back across to Sorata, serving beer, coffee, juices, good sandwiches, snacks, and delicious home-made bread, yoghurt and cakes in a laid-back atmosphere. Closed Tues, as well as the low-season months of Feb and March.

Casa Reggae One block west of *Hostal El Mirador*. If things seem dead uptown, that's probably because most of the neo-hippy travellers are having a beer amidst the thatched bohemia here. Occasional live music, including reggae.

Green Dragon Across from *Casa Reggae*. A brand-spanking-new café bar from the folks behind the much lamented *Spider Bar*, offering upscale snacks like baked brie, as well as quality beers, wines, coffee, herbal teas and homemade goodies from *Café Illampu*.

Trekking from Sorata

For most visitors, the main attraction of Sorata is the chance to walk some of the spectacular **trails** that run through the surrounding mountains. As well as numerous half- and one-day hikes immediately around Sorata (the most popular of which is to the Gruta de San Pedro, described on p.158), some excellent longer treks start near the town. These take you through remote traditional communities and memorable high Andean scenery, up amongst the glacial peaks of Mount Illampu or even across the spine of the cordillera and down into the steamy tropical valleys of the Yungas.

Most local guides, porters and mule handlers in Sorata align themselves with one of two organisations: **Asociación Guías Turísticas Sorata**, whose office is located opposite the *Residencial Sorata*, just off the plaza on Calle Sucre (ⓣ02/71594612, ⓔguiasorata@hotmail.com), and **Unión de Guías Eco Illampu**, on Calle Murillo 212, just up from *Hostal Panchita* (ⓣ02/71232816, ⓔp_torrezcoronel@hotmail.com). Both are good places to meet up with other people, and each can arrange guides for all the main trekking routes around Sorata for more or less the same prices: about $10–20 a day plus food. They also organize the hire of mules, which can carry up to about 20kg and cost about $8 a day plus food for the handler. Additionally, they have a limited amount of camping equipment for rent, including tents, stoves and sleeping bags, though don't count on what you need being available. Most local guides know the routes up to the main base camps for climbing Illampu, though they're not qualified climbing guides; if you want a climbing guide you should hire one through a climbing agency in La Paz (see p.114). If you prefer two wheels to two legs, there's the option of a mountain-bike trip with the Andean Biking Co-Op (ⓦwww.andeanbiking.com), whose office doubles as the *Green Dragon* café (see opposite). From April to November, American expat and Team Bolivia veteran Travis Yossarian Grey runs adventure trips ($50–75 a day) on the area's high-altitude scree and Inca trails, as well as a combined bike and raft expedition to Rurrenabaque and an annual downhill jamboree called the Jach`a Avalanche.

The treks

One of the most popular high-altitude treks from Sorata is the four-day **Lagunas Glacier and Chillata Trek**. This takes you high up the western side of the Illampu massif to two lakes set at over 5000m, from where there are beautiful views of the glaciers and back down into the San Cristóbal Valley. Longer, tougher and even more spectacular is the **Illampu Circuit** (6–7 days), which takes you right round the Illampu massif past isolated settlements and over several passes between 4500m and 5045m, the highest of which, Abra Calzada, affords incredible views back over Lago Titicaca. Be warned, though, that recent years have witnessed a spate of violent robberies in the vicinity of Laguna San Francisco, near the end of the circuit; some agencies have taken the route off their schedules completely. If you are planning on hiking it, it's advisable to thoroughly check out the current security situation on the ground, and always use knowledgeable local guides. There are also two long treks that head from Sorata down into the tropical valleys of the Yungas. The **Mapiri Trail** (7–8 days) is a tough descent to the mining town of Mapiri in the Yungas, from where you can continue by motorized canoe and road to Coroico or down to Rurrenabaque. Built in the nineteenth century as a route for bringing quinine up from the Amazon lowlands, the Mapiri Trail runs through a beautiful and remote region of forest-covered mountains. The trail is frequently overgrown with vegetation or blocked by fallen trees, so carry a machete, and bring plenty of water during the dry season, as water is scarce along much of the trail. The **Camino de Oro** (Goldminers' Trail; 5–7 days) also runs down to the Yungas, taking you through dramatic changes in landscape and vegetation. Dating back to pre-Columbian times, the trail connects the Altiplano with the alluvial goldfields of the Yungas, and impressive remnants of Inca stonework can still be seen along its length, though the lower stretches pass through areas badly deforested by mining activity. The trail emerges at the gold-mining camps along the Río Tipuani, from where transport is available downriver to Guanay.

El Ceibo Calle Muñecas. First-floor restaurant serving standard Bolivian fare at moderate prices, including filling set *almuerzos* and *cenas* for $1, as well as breakfasts.

Pete's Place Inside *Hostal Don Julio*, Calle Esquivel 8, just off the southwest edge of the plaza. Highly rated, moderately priced gringo favourite specializing in authentically spiced rarities like chicken and vegetable curries, as well as the full range of more familiar meat and veggie options. Don't miss the $2.50 vegetarian *almuerzo*.

Pizzeria Italia Plaza Enrique Peñaranda ☎02/2895009. The best of three restaurants on the southeast corner of the plaza with near-identical names and similar menus. This one has surprisingly good pizza by Bolivian standards (there are also branches In La Paz, Copacabana, Coroico, Rurrenabaque and Uyuni) with professionally thin and crisp bases, as well as reasonable pasta from about $3, juices, cold beer and wine by the glass. Also does decent breakfasts.

Ristorante Bella Bologna Next to *Hostal Panchita* on the Plaza. Although this place looks like yet another pizzeria, it also does Mexican staples like enchiladas, quesadillas and tacos, both meat and veggie, as well as vegetarian novelties like beans and rice and grilled aubergine. Often one of the latest-opening places in low season.

Gruta de San Pedro

There are numerous half- and one-day walks from Sorata – simply follow any trail out of town – but the best is the hike down the San Cristóbal valley to the **Gruta de San Pedro**, a large cave about 12km away (4–6hr round trip on foot, or a $5 taxi ride, cheaper if you can round up more people to share the cost). Follow Avenida 9 de Abril out of town past the football pitch, then take the left turn, signposted to the *gruta*, about fifteen minutes outside town, which leads you along the opposite side of the valley, past the *Café Illampu* (alternatively, you can cut straight across the valley from town). The road continues down the narrow ravine of the Río San Cristóbal, with good views of Illampu looming above. After about 11km you'll reach the small village of **San Pedro**; the Gruta de San Pedro (daily 8am–5pm; $1.25) is just above the road on the right, about 1km further on. The cave is long, narrow and about 12m high, with plenty of bats – you can go about 150m inside before your way is blocked by an underground lake. A guardian will turn on the lights in the cave in return for the admission fee.

The Cordillera Apolobamba

North of Lago Titicaca, flush with the Peruvian border, rises the **Cordillera Apolobamba**, the remote northern extension of the Cordillera Oriental. The splendour of the high mountain scenery in this isolated range equals or even exceeds that of the Cordillera Real, and the environment is more pristine. The region is now protected by the recently established **Area Natural de Manejo Integrado Nacional Apolobamba**, which covers nearly 5000 square kilometres and is home to a small number of mostly Quechua- and Aymara-speaking farmers and herders. The range is still rich in Andean wildlife which is only rarely seen elsewhere: condors, caracaras and other big birds are frequently seen; pumas and spectacled bears still roam the most isolated regions; and large herds of vicuña can be seen from the road which crosses the plain of **Ulla Ulla**, a high plateau that runs along the western side of the range. The Cordillera Apolobamba is also home to Bolivia's most mysterious indigenous culture, the **Kallawayas**, itinerant herbalists, famous throughout the Andes, who preserve secret healing techniques handed down over generations and still speak an arcane language that may have come to them from the Incas.

During the colonial era the Cordillera Apolobamba was an important gold-mining centre, and the mining settlements established by the Spanish also served as bases for conquistadors and missionaries to launch expeditions down into the Amazon lowlands, though these were never brought under effective Spanish control. During the Great Rebellion of 1781 many of the colonial mines in the region were abandoned, and rumours persist of a mother lode of gold concealed in a long-abandoned mine, still waiting to be discovered.

Tourist infrastructure is virtually nonexistent in this isolated region, but for the adventurous it offers perhaps the best high-mountain trekking in Bolivia. The only real towns in the Cordillera Apolobamba are **Pelechuco** and **Charazani**, both of which can be reached by tough but spectacular bus journeys from La Paz. Between the two runs the fabulous four- or five-day **Trans-Apolobamba Trek**, which takes you through the heart of the range, past glacier-covered peaks and through traditional indigenous villages. Some tour operators in La Paz take groups on this trek; alternatively you can organize local guides and mules in either Charazani or Pelechuco. Another alternative is the new Pacha Trek project, a joint Aymara-Quechua community initiative with an itinerary of remote Apolobamban settlements and "Interpretive Centers" detailing the area's textiles, medicinal plant use and more. The cost is $120 per person, with departures every Wednesday through Millenarian Travel, Av Sánchez Lima 2193, La Paz (ⓣ02/2414753, ⓔinfo@boliviamilenaria.com).

Charazani, Curva and Lagunillas

From **Escoma** (see p.149), on the remote northeastern shore of Lago Titicaca, a rough road heads north into the Cordillera Apolobamba, climbing to over 4500m. After about 50km it forks, one branch heading north along the western edge of the cordillera and the Peruvian frontier to Ulla Ulla and Pelechuco (see p.159), the other dropping down to the town of **CHARAZANI**, about 260km by road from La Paz. Perched at about 3200m on the side of a deep valley, Charazani is the market centre for the Kallawaya communities of the surrounding area, and the nearest town to the Trans-Apolobamba Trek north across the heart of the Cordillera Apolobamba to Pelechuco (see p.162 for details). The town itself dates back to colonial times, but the area was settled long before the arrival of the Spanish; the steep valley slopes all around are sculpted into pre-Hispanic terraces, built to increase the area of land available for maize cultivation in this vital ecological niche.

A few crumbling colonial houses still survive, but most of the town's buildings are cheap, modern constructions of adobe or cement. The **central plaza** is lined with shops selling basic supplies to the campesinos from surrounding communities. Daily **buses** to and from La Paz (8–10hr) terminate outside the two transport company offices on the plaza, where you'll also find a couple of basic *pensiones* where you can get simple meals. The best **place to stay** is the *Hotel Akhamani* (no phone; ①), a block south of the plaza, which has clean rooms with shared bathroom as well as a small apartment with kitchen (②); the helpful owner, Egberto Alvarez, can help organize mules and guides for the trek to Pelechuco. About ten minutes' walk east of town along the road to Curva and then down a steep path to the valley floor are the **aguas termales**

The Kallawayas: medicine men of the Andes

The Cordillera Apolobamba is home to Bolivia's smallest and most mysterious ethnic group: the **Kallawayas**. Inhabiting just half a dozen villages in the Upper Charazani Valley, the Kallawayas are a secretive caste of traditional herbal medicine practitioners, thought to number just a few hundred, who are famous throughout the Andes for their healing powers, even more so since UNESCO declared their "Andean cosmovision" (i.e. the totality of their belief system, encompassing every aspect of life) a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2003. The enormous ecological diversity of the Cordillera Apolobamba means the Kallawayas have a vast natural pharmacy of plants to draw on, while the region's proximity to the tropical lowlands has also given them access to the vast medicinal resources of Amazonian shamanism. Individual Kallawayas may know the medical properties of over 900 different plant species – an encyclopedic herbal knowledge which is passed from father to son. Some historical sources credit the Kallawayas with being the first to use the dried bark of the Cinchona tree, the source of quinine, to prevent and cure malaria; taken to Europe by the Jesuits, quinine remains to this day the basis for most treatments of the disease. More recently, scientists from the University of California have been studying chemicals derived from herbs used by the Kallawayas as possible treatments for the HIV virus.

For many centuries the Kallawayas have wandered through the Andes collecting herbs and bringing their specialist medical skills to local people. Individual healers roamed huge distances, often on foot, travelling to Peru, Chile, Argentina and as far as Panamá during the construction of the canal, as well as the length and breadth of Bolivia. Most Kallawayas are also powerful ritual specialists, combining their skills as herbalists with the supposed ability to predict the future and diagnose illness by reading coca leaves. Their holistic cures involve tackling the spiritual causes of sickness too, and they are experts at placating the mountain gods and other natural spirits through ritual offerings, as well as being able to make highly prized protective amulets. The most enigmatic thing about the Kallawayas, however, is their language. Although the main language spoken in their communities is Quechua, and many also speak some Aymara or Spanish, the Kallawaya medicine men famously speak a secret tongue known as **Machaj Juyay**, which is used only in healing rituals and other ceremonies. This language has provoked intense speculation: some researchers believe that Machaj Juyay is related to the secret language spoken in private by the Inca ruling elite, distinct from Quechua, which was the lingua franca of their empire. Certainly, the earliest post-conquest chroniclers linked the Kallawayas to the Incas. One wrote that the Kallawayas were brought to the imperial city of Cusco to act as herbalists and carry out important religious ceremonies and divination rituals for the Inca rulers; another claimed they had been charged with carrying the litter of the Inca himself. Other evidence suggests that the Kallawayas date back far into Andean prehistory: in 1970 archeologists uncovered a skeleton in the Charazani valley which had been buried with recognizable Kallawaya paraphernalia – this was carbon-dated to between 800 and 1000 BC, two thousand years before the rise of the Inca Empire.

These days the Kallawayas no longer wander as far and wide as they used to, and their numbers are thought to be dwindling, as fewer sons acquire their fathers' knowledge. However, a growing number are now resident in La Paz, where their skills remain in high demand – up to eighty percent of Bolivians are thought to have called on a natural healer at some point in their lives, and nearly half use only traditional medicine.

(daily 7am–9pm; $0.60), natural hot springs channelled into an open-air concrete swimming pool which offer an excellent way to soothe tired muscles after a long trek.

Every other day or so, one of the buses from La Paz to Charazani continues up the valley to the village of **CURVA**. Curva is the centre of Kallawaya culture (see box, opposite) and the starting or ending point of the Trans-Apolobamba Trek. If there's no bus you can walk up to Curva from Charazani in about four hours, following the footpath that starts near the hot springs and cuts across the valley floor, before climbing up the other side to Curva (the road itself contours round and takes much longer to walk). Even if you're not planning to trek to Pelechuco, the walk up to Curva is very rewarding: the valley is beautiful, its steep sides sculpted by ancient terraces, and the path takes you through several Kallawaya farming villages.

Perched at about 3780m on a narrow ridge above the valley, with the snows of Akhamani, the sacred mountain of the Kallawayas, rising above, Curva itself is a deeply traditional community and the effective capital of Kallawaya culture. With thatched stone houses and cobbled streets it's a picturesque village, but people here are quite wary of outsiders, and if you're staying the night you're better off in **LAGUNILLAS**, the modern settlement beside the lake – a fifteen-minute walk below Curva. The protected areas agency SERNAP (Ⓦwww.sernap.gov.bo) has opened a community-run **refugio** (no phone; ①) for trekkers here, with warm dormitories boasting bunks and solar-heated showers, and you can also **camp** beside the lake, which is usually busy with ducks, *huallata* geese and other wildfowl. The lake is actually artificial, having been built as a reservoir to feed a series of pools nearby which are used to prepare freeze-dried potatoes known as *tunta*, a food-preservation technique dating back to the Incas and before. The rangers at the *refugio* can help find guides and mules to take you on the trek to Pelechuco, and you should register with them before proceeding further into the mountains. Ask around here and you should be able to arrange a consultation with a **Kallawaya medicine man**, who'll read your future in coca leaves for a few bolivianos and may even be able to treat any ailments you might be suffering from.

Ulla Ulla

From the junction where the side road to Charazani branches off, the road running north along the Peruvian frontier towards Pelechuco (see p.159) climbs onto a high and windswept plateau, known as **Ulla Ulla**, which runs along the western side of the Cordillera Apolobamba. Covering some 2000 square kilometres at an average altitude of 4300m, Ulla Ulla's broad expanse of green pasture and marshland, set against a dramatic backdrop of snowcapped peaks, supports great herds of alpacas and llamas, as well as smaller groups of vicuñas, their delicate wild cousins. The plateau has been a protected area since 1972, when the **Reserva Nacional de Fauna Ulla Ulla** was established to protect the highly endangered vicuña population – it's made an astonishing recovery since then, and just driving across the plateau you'll see dozens of vicuñas and many hundreds of alpacas, as well as a wide variety of birds including flamingos, ibises and *huallata* geese. The only signs of human habitation are the occasional herders' hamlets, lonely clusters of stone houses and animal corrals surrounded by pointed adobe structures known as *putucos* – they look a bit like Buddhist stupas, but are in fact used to store llama and alpaca dung, the only fuel available on this treeless plain. The biggest settlement is **Ulla Ulla village**, though it has no facilities of any kind. If you want to spend the night here and explore areas away from the road you'll need to camp. If you've got your own transport, there are some good natural **hot springs** an hour's drive or so further north of Ulla Ulla village, just off the road at **Putina**.

Pelechuco

Beyond Ulla Ulla the road climbs up from the plateau and over a 4860-metre pass between glittering glacial peaks before dropping down to the town of **PELECHUCO**, set in a deep valley which is often shrouded in cloud (its name is derived from the Quechua expression *puyu kuchu*, meaning place of clouds). This is the end of the road for vehicles but the starting (or ending) point of the **Trans-Apolobamba Trek** (see below). Pelechuco was founded by the Spanish in 1560 as a gold-mining outpost, and limited mining activity continues in the region, but otherwise the town serves mainly as a market centre for the Quechua-speaking farming and herding communities of the surrounding mountains.

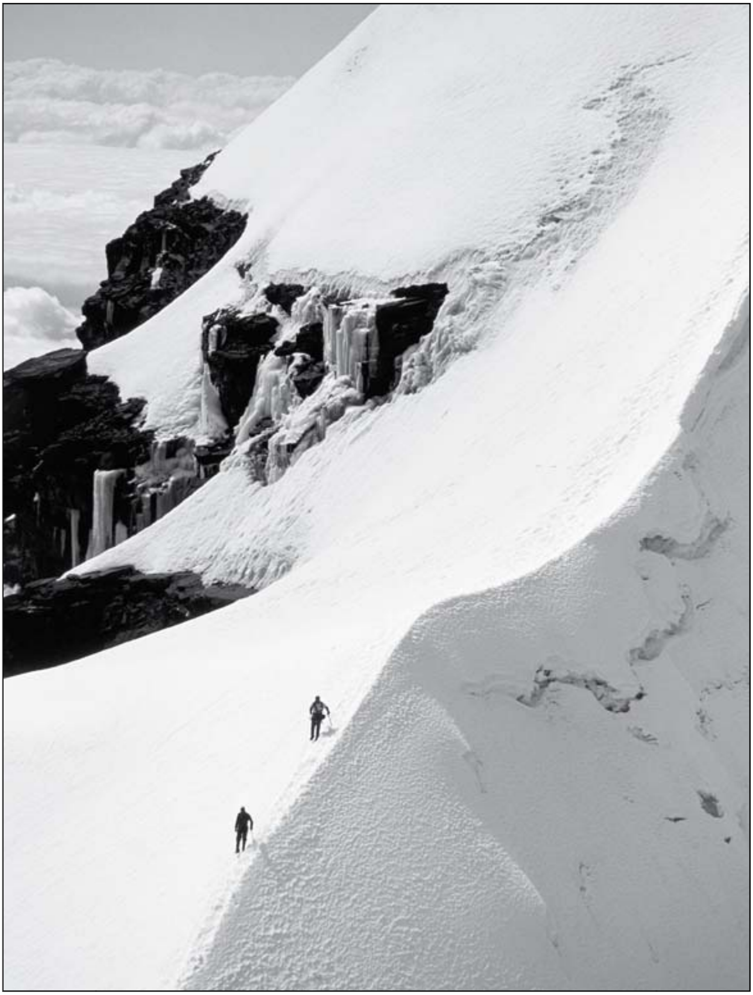
Some buildings survive from the colonial era, notably the simple adobe **church** with its stone bell tower (currently under restoration), but the rough stone houses with thatched roofs are gradually being replaced by ugly modern zinc-roofed brick and concrete structures. The steep valley slopes around the town are still covered in dense cloudforest, including large numbers of the rare queñua (*polylepis*) tree, a gnarled shrub that can survive at very high altitudes. On some of the hillsides above the town you can make out the remains of pre-Hispanic agricultural terracing, as well as occasional stone look-out posts, known as *pucaras*, which were probably built in Inca or pre-Inca times to guard the approach to the pass against raiding tribes coming up the valley from the Amazon lowlands.

Buses to Pelechuco from La Paz (13hrs) leave on Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday and return on Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday, departing from Calle Reyes Cardona in the cemetery district of La Paz. Services also run from the Tranca Rio Seco on the outskirts of El Alto, where you can buy tickets in advance from a kiosk: you'll need to take a taxi to find it. The best **place to stay** is the basic *Hotel Llajtaymanta* (no phone; ①), on the central plaza, where you can also get simple meals. The helpful owner, Reynaldo Vasquez, can help you find mules and guides for the Trans-Apolobamba Trek, and also sells bus tickets to La Paz. Alternatively, there's another SERNAP-initiated community **refugio** (no phone; ① per person) in nearby **AGUA BLANCA**.

The Trans-Apolobamba Trek

The tough four- or five-day **Trans-Apolobamba Trek** between Pelechuco and Curva takes you through the heart of the Cordillera Apolobamba and some of the most magnificent high-Andean scenery in Bolivia. It also passes through the homeland of the Kallawayas (see box, p.160), and around the peak of their sacred mountain, Akhamani. Crossing several high passes, including one over 5100m, this is a hard trek, and shouldn't really be attempted without a guide. There are no reliable maps of the region (the last survey was conducted by the British Royal Geographical Society in 1911–13), and even if you have good directions it's easy to get lost, particularly if you're over 4000m high and the clouds close in.

You can walk the trek either from Pelechuco south to Curva or vice versa, though it's best to start in Pelechuco, where guides and mules can be more easily arranged, and finish in Curva, close to Charazani, from where transport out is much more reliable – end your trek in Pelechuco and you could wait five days for the next bus. **Guides and mules** can be organized in Curva (through the rangers at Lagunillas), Pelechuco (ask at the *Hotel Llajtaymanta*) and Charazani (ask at the *Hotel Akhamani*), or you can arrange to do the trek with a tour operator in La Paz (see p.114). Guides, mules and mule handlers should cost



▲ Trekkers in the Cordillera Apolobamba

about $8-10 per day each. You can buy basic foodstuffs (pasta, potatoes, tinned fish) in both towns, but you'll need to bring all other equipment and supplies with you from La Paz.

The route

From **Pelechuco**, the route heads steeply out of town to the southeast, climbing to a high pass at 4800m (4–5hr). Beyond the pass, the path zigzags down a steep scree slope to the head of a glacial valley about 300m below (30min). You can camp here, or continue down the valley to the village of **Ilo-Ilo** (30min), where you can buy basic supplies. From Ilo-Ilo the path climbs southeast towards the 5100-metre **Sunchuli Pass**, passing through the small village of Piedra Grande. A mining road runs up to the pass, but you should take the more direct path that branches off it to the left after the village. In all, it's a five- to six-hour hour climb from Ilo-Ilo to the pass. Don't attempt to clear the pass after about 4pm, as clouds can close in quickly and completely, reducing visibility and making route-finding impossible. There's a good but cold camping site on a green meadow about ninety minutes before the pass, where you should overnight if you can't clear the pass before mid-afternoon.

On the other side of the pass, follow the mining road down for about fifteen minutes to the top of a green valley; there are good camping spots a little further down beside a stream in the valley. Otherwise, when the road contours round to the left, cut across to the right-hand side until you hit a narrow irrigation canal, then take the path running above it to the east. After about 45 minutes the path climbs over the shoulder of the mountain to the east, opening up fantastic views to the south of the last cloud-covered ridges of the Andes marching down into the Amazon lowlands, with the distant peaks of the Cordillera Real rising behind. It then drops steeply down to the abandoned mining village of **Viscachani**, then contours round to the south, past a lake and up over another ridge. Above the lake to the right rises the peak of **Akhamani** (5700m), the sacred mountain of the Kallawayas.

From the ridge you can see the next pass, marked by two stone *apachetas* to the southwest. From there, take the path down to the southeast, which soon descends a hair-raisingly steep switchback path known as *mil curvas* ("a thousand bends") carved out of a loose scree slope. This descends from 4650m to 4150m in just an hour or two, bringing you out beside a small stream. Across the stream you'll find **Incachani**, a collection of ancient (and presumably Inca) ruined buildings at the top of a green valley which is an excellent place to camp.

From here the path climbs southwest to a 4700-metre pass below the peak of Akhamani before dropping down and contouring southwest to another pass, again marked by stone *apachetas*. From here, the path heads south down a deep valley to **Jatun Pampa**, an alpaca-herding hamlet set on the grassy valley floor where you can camp. From Jatun Pampa it's another two to three hours to Curva. Continue down and across the river then climb diagonally up to the left on the opposite slope. Descend again and cross another river, then pick up a path climbing to the left to another mountain spur. From here you can see **Curva** a short distance below to the left, and **Lagunillas** (see p.161) by the lake a little further down to the right.

The Yungas

East of La Paz, the Cordillera Real drops precipitously into the Amazon lowlands, plunging down through a region of rugged, forest-covered mountains and deep subtropical valleys known as **the Yungas**. Blessed with fertile alluvial soils and watered by the plentiful rains which are formed when hot air from the Amazon basin hits the Andes, the warm valleys of the Yungas produce abundant crops of coffee, tropical fruit and coca for the markets of La Paz and the rest of the Altiplano; indeed, long before the Spanish conquest the peoples of the Andes maintained agricultural colonies here to supply the Altiplano with coca (most of the leaves going to the mines of Potosí) and other subtropical products. While still as legal as it was then, coca growing remains a political hot potato, particularly vis-à-vis the US, whose eradication policies have been resisted tooth and nail by the *cocaleros*, led, of course, by current president Evo Morales himself (see p.297 for more details). Several of the sturdy stone roads which originally transported the leaves – and linked the Yungas outposts to the main population centres – today provide some of the most scenic, challenging hiking in the region. Three of these so-called "Inca" trails (though they were probably earlier routes which were used and modified by Incas) – the **Takesi**, **Choro** and **Yunga Cruz trails** – are still in good condition, and make excellent three- to four-day hikes from the environs of La Paz. The Choro Trail also passes through the pristine cloudforests of **Parque Nacional Cotapata**, one of the few areas where the natural Yungas vegetation is still well preserved. Even if you don't hike, the journey down to the Yungas from the Altiplano is truly spectacular. The original **road from La Paz to Coroico** is widely considered the most dangerous in the world, hugging the forest-covered mountain slopes as it winds above fearsome precipices. It's also amongst the most scenic and dramatic, and – since the recent opening of a bypass – frequented mostly by travellers on mountain bikes, an unforgettable descent of over 3500m in just over 60km. While the road is still open to those brave/foolhardy enough to tackle it, the vast majority of motorists use the bypass.

The most frequently visited Yungas town is the idyllic resort of **Coroico**, set amidst spectacular scenery and exuberant tropical vegetation and boasting a warm climate that provides the perfect antidote to the bleak Altiplano. From Coroico, the road continues north towards Rurrenabaque and the Bolivian Amazon (covered in Chapter 6). Alternatively, you can avoid Coroico and instead go to **Chulumani**, a less-touristed Yungas market town that's the centre of the equally scenic but less frequently visited **South Yungas**.

Afro-Bolivianos

Isolated in a handful of villages in the Yungas valleys is perhaps the most forgotten ethnic group in Bolivia: the **Afro-Bolivianos**. Now numbering about 8000, the Afro-Bolivianos are the descendants of African slaves brought to the Andes by the Spanish during the colonial era to work in the mines of Potosí. When silver-mining declined they were moved to the Yungas to work on coca and other plantations – their higher natural resistance to malaria meant they were more resilient workers than Aymara migrants from the Altiplano. Though slavery was officially abolished with independence from Spain in 1825, Bolivia's black population remained in bondage to landowners until after the Revolution and Agrarian Reform of 1952–53, when they finally gained control of their own lands and freedom from servitude. Most subsequently remained in the Yungas, cultivating coca, fruit and coffee on small farms.

Living in small communities in the midst of a far larger Aymara population, the Afro-Bolivianos have been heavily influenced by their indigenous neighbours: most speak Aymara as well as Spanish, and many Afro-Bolivian women dress in the bowler hats and pollera skirts favoured by the Aymara. But they also maintain a distinctive cultural identity – indeed, until recently they even elected their own king. The most powerful reminder of their African cultural roots is undoubtedly to be found in their music and dance, such as the intricate and compelling drum-driven rhythms of musical styles like the *saya*. Incorporated into dances like the *Morenada*, seen at the Oruro Carnaval and fiestas throughout the Andes, these rhythms are also reminders of the cultural influence this small group has had on mainstream Bolivian society, despite a tendency by the authorities to ignore their existence.

Parque Nacional Cotapata

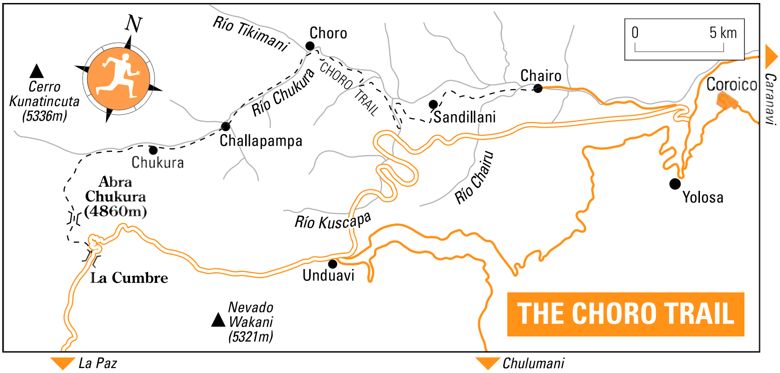
Around 20km north of La Paz, some 400 square kilometres of the north face of the Cordillera Real are protected by **Parque Nacional y Area Natural de Manejo Integrado Cotapata**. Ranging in elevation from 1000m to 6000m, Cotapata embraces many of the astonishing range of different ecosystems and climatic zones formed as the Andes plunge down into the valleys of the upper Amazon Basin. Within a remarkably short distance high mountain peaks, snowfields and puna grasslands give way to dense cloudforest, which in turn gradually blends into the humid montane forest that covers the lower slopes of the Andes in a thick green blanket. The **cloudforest** – also known as the *ceja de selva*, or "jungle's eyebrows" – is particularly striking, made up of low, gnarled trees covered in lichens and epiphytes which absorb moisture from the clouds that are formed when warm air from the Amazon lowlands hits the cold ridges of the Andes. It's also home to many unique bird species, as well as elusive mammals like the puma and spectacled bear.

The Choro Trail

The only way to visit Cotapata properly is by walking through the park along the pre-Hispanic **Choro Trail**. Running almost entirely downhill, the 70-kilometre trail is easy to follow and can be walked in three to four days. Most trekking agencies in La Paz run tours along this route, but if you have your own camping equipment, a compass and (ideally) a map, it's relatively simple to do without a guide.

To reach the trail, take any bus heading to the Yungas from Villa Fátima in La Paz (see p.116) and get off at **La Cumbre**, the high pass 22km north of the city. From the lakes just before La Cumbre, head north-northwest to another pass, **Abra Chukura** (4860m), which is marked by a stone cairn (*apacheta*). This 45-minute walk is the only part of the route which is difficult to follow – if in doubt-stick to the rough track that winds up to the pass. From the *apacheta*, a well-paved Inca or pre-Inca stone path (up to 4m wide in places) plunges down the left side of the deep valley of the Río Phajchiri, passing the ruins of an Inca waystation, or *tambo*, after an hour or so. After another two to three hours you'll reach the small village of **Chukura**.

Below Chukura the cloudforest begins, the vegetation gradually thickening as you descend. After another hour you reach **Challapampa**, a small village with



THE CHORO TRAIL

a shop that sells soft drinks, beer and basic foodstuffs. There's a good camping spot by the stream here, though the locals will expect you to pay a dollar or two. The next campsite is another three hours down the valley, just before the village of **Choro**. At Choro the path crosses over the river on a bridge and climbs east along the right-hand side of a deep, densely forested valley – the track is still largely paved and is supported by a well-preserved stone platform in places. The next available water and camping spot is another two hours or so away where a stream crosses the path; about three hours beyond that you reach **Sandillani**, where you can camp in the beautifully tended garden of a venerable Japanese man; there's also a small shop here. From Sandillani it's another two hours down the valley to the end of the trail at the village of **Chairo**, where you can camp and buy supplies.

From Chairo it's about 11km to the main road and another 4km to **Yolosa** (see p.168), from where there's regular transport on to Coroico and back to La Paz. If you're lucky you'll find a *camioneta* from Chairo to Yolosa (about $2 per person), though it's more likely you'll either have to walk or hire a driver to take you there, which should cost about $20 for the vehicle and driver.

La Paz to Coroico

Few highways in the world have as intimidating a reputation as the original road linking La Paz with Coroico in the North Yungas. A rough, narrow track chiselled out of near-vertical mountainsides that descends more than 3500m over a distance of just 64km, it's still widely referred to as the **world's most dangerous road**, a title bestowed on it by the Inter-American Development Bank. Statistically, the sobriquet is difficult to dispute: dozens of vehicles have gone off the road each year, and with vertical drops of up to 1000m over the edge, annual fatalities have reached into the hundreds. Even in the context of the heavy traffic it received – it was the main link between the Altiplano and the Amazon, and between Brazil and the Pacific coast – this was worrying stuff. For a while the road was declared one-way on alternate days and accidents were much reduced as a result, but two-way traffic was reintroduced after lorry drivers complained that their incomes were being affected. After years of construction, however, the new multi-million-dollar bypass around the most perilous stretch was finally opened in December 2006, following a route which looms high over the old road on the opposite side of the valley and which tunnels intermittently through the mountainside. While final touches are still being put on the latter section and some of the concrete and supporting rods holding the sheerest inclines at bay have already fallen prey to the elements, it's still a huge improvement – at least space- and safety-wise – over the old route.

What the statistics don't tell you is that the old route – and to a certain extent the bypass as well – is also amongst the most beautiful roads in the world. Starting amidst the icebound peaks of the Cordillera Real, it plunges down through the clouds into the humid valleys of the Yungas, winding along deep, narrow gorges where dense cloudforest clings to even the steepest slopes. So spectacular is the descent that travelling the old Yungas road by **mountain bike** is one of Bolivia's most popular tourist attractions, an exhilarating ride that's easy to organize as a day-trip with tour companies in La Paz (Gravity Assisted Mountain Biking – see p.115 – has the best reputation). Though cycling down the most dangerous road in the world may sound like a crazy proposition, the re-routing of most traffic to the bypass means that – in theory, at least – it's now safer than it's ever been, especially if you go with a reputable tour company which has good guides and well-maintained bikes. Of course, biking the road is not entirely without risk, and people have been hurt and several even killed during the descent, forced off the edge by traffic. Nowadays, the situation is different and at least on a bicycle you're in control of your own speed, and – also in theory – you'll also avoid head-on collisions (the guide goes first) with the few oncoming vehicles that still ply the road (on the misguided premise of saving fuel, apparently), as well as catastrophic brake failure – two problems that caused many of the motor-vehicle accidents in the past, most of which involving foreign travellers were vehicles driven by other foreigners. Going by bike also means you can stop and enjoy the unforgettable views whenever you want.

While the 106-kilometre bypass has slashed the journey time from La Paz to Coroico to about three hours by bus (two and a half by car), the old road (which took about four and a half hours by car or bus) takes about five to six hours by bike. From Villa Fátima in La Paz, the road to the Yungas first climbs northeast to **La Cumbre**, a 4800-metre pass over the Cordillera Real. From here it descends to **Unduavi**, a roadside hamlet with a police checkpoint where vehicles are searched for unauthorized coca on the way out of the Yungas, precursor chemicals for cocaine manufacture (such as hydrochloric acid and acetone) and cocaine itself. At Unduavi the road forks, one branch descending southeast towards Chulumani in the South Yungas (see p.174), the other descending northeast towards Coroico and the Amazon lowlands beyond.

The *nueva carretera* (new road) initially follows the original northeast fork before splitting off and climbing high above it, following a similar trajectory along the spine of the mountains before descending to join the original road north of **YOLOSA**, a hamlet set at about 1200m. Here, a newly cobbled side road climbs up to Coroico, 11km away, while the main road continues 74km north to Caranavi and beyond to Rurrenabaque.

Following the old route in its entirety from Unduavi, the first 40km are the most perilous and spectacular of the entire route. At times the road is only 3m wide, looming over precipices more than 1km deep. To make matters worse, the road is often swathed in cloud, and in places waterfalls crash down onto its surface. About 86km from La Paz, the road reaches Yolosa. If you're not on a direct bus to Coroico you can change here and catch one of the regular pick-up trucks (*camionetas*) that carry passengers up to Coroico from the police checkpoint. You can also get transport further north along the main road towards Caranavi and Rurrenabaque.

Coroico and around

The peaceful little town of **COROICO** is rightly considered one of the most beautiful spots in the Yungas, perched on a steep mountain slope 600m or so above the river of the same name, with panoramic views across the forest-covered Andean foothills to the icy peaks of the Cordillera Real beyond. Founded in the colonial era as a gold-mining outpost, the town is still an important market centre for the surrounding agricultural communities, and in recent years has also become a popular destination for Paceños looking to escape the cold of the Altiplano. Set at an altitude of 1760m, it enjoys a warm and pleasantly humid climate, and this, combined with the dramatic scenery and good facilities, makes it an excellent place to relax and recuperate. While travellers might not need the same time in Coroico they once did just to recover from reaching the

▲ Coroico and the Cordillera Real

town in the first place – whether making the journey down from the Altiplano by micro, following the old route by mountain bike or making the slower trek on foot down the Choro Trail – Coroico is still worth visiting just for the sheer thrill of getting there. It also makes a great stopoff if you're attempting the tough overland journey from La Paz to Rurrenabaque or elsewhere in the Amazon lowlands, and if you're heading in the opposite direction it's a good place to begin acclimatizing to the higher altitude.

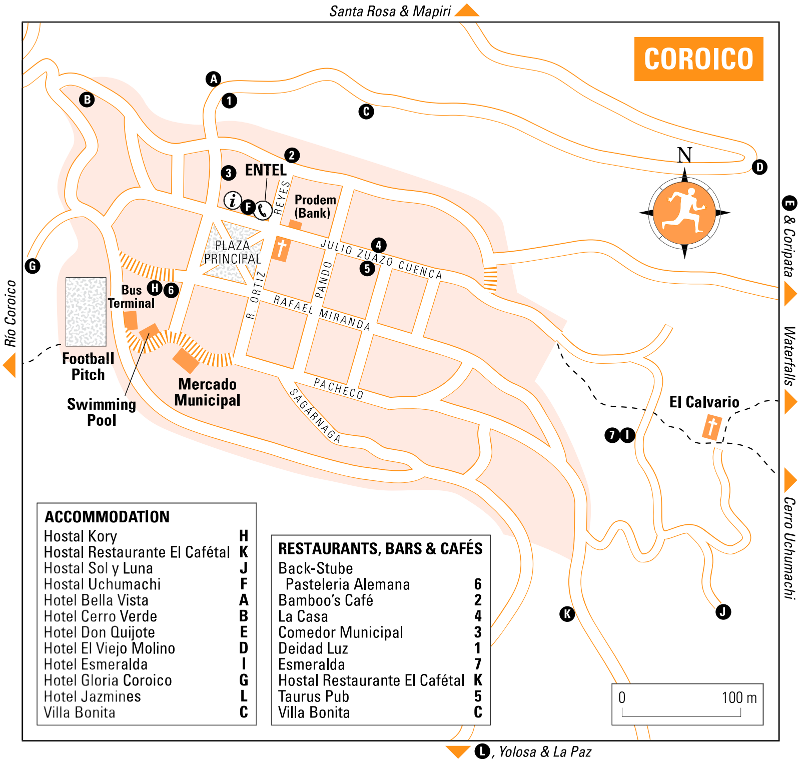
It's hardly surprising, then, that most visitors spend much of their time in Coroico lounging by a swimming pool, sipping a cold drink and enjoying the fantastic views. For those with a bit more energy, however, there are some pleasant walks through the surrounding countryside, whose forested mountain slopes are covered in a lush patchwork of coffee and coca plantations and banana and orange groves. Coroico gets very busy at **weekends** and during Bolivian public holidays, when it's transformed by large numbers of Paceños on vacation. This certainly makes things livelier, especially where nightlife is concerned, but if you want to relax in peace – and avoid hiked-up hotel rates – it's best to visit during the week.

Around October 20 each year, Coroico celebrates its biggest annual **fiesta** with several days of drinking, processions and costumed dances. The fiesta commemorates the day in 1811 when the statue of the Virgin in the church – brought here from Barcelona in 1680, when Coroico was founded – supposedly summoned a ghost army to drive off a force of indigenous rebels that were besieging the town.

Arrival and information

Buses and micros from La Paz drop passengers off at the new **bus station** on the south side of town above the football pitch. If you're coming to Coroico from anywhere else, you'll have to catch a pick-up truck for the fifteen-minute ride up from the main road at Yolosa – these drop passengers off outside the Mercado Municipal, on Sagárnaga.

Coroico's a small town and almost everything is within easy walking distance of the plaza, where you can also usually find a taxi to take you to the more


Santa Rosa & Mapiri
COROICO
N
E & Coripata
Waterfalls
Cerro Uchumachi
El Calvario
Rio Coroico
ENTEL
Prodem (Bank)
REYES
PLAZA PRINCIPAL
JULIO ZUAZO CUENCA
PANDO
R. ORTIZ
RAFAEL MIRANDA
PACHECO
SAGARNAGA
Bus Terminal
Football Pitch
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ACCOMMODATION	
Hostal Kory	H
Hostal Restaurante El Cafétal	K
Hostal Sol y Luna	J
Hostal Uchumachi	F
Hotel Bella Vista	A
Hotel Cerro Verde	B
Hotel Don Quijote	E
Hotel El Viejo Molino	D
Hotel Esmeralda	I
Hotel Gloria Coroico	G
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Villa Bonita	C

RESTAURANTS, BARS & CAFÉS	
Back-Stube Pasteleria Alemana	6
Bamboo's Café	2
La Casa	4
Comedor Municipal	3
Deidad Luz	1
Esmeralda	7
Hostal Restaurante El Cafétal	K
Taurus Pub	5
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outlying hotels. The local hoteliers' association and association of **tourist** guides share a small **office** on the plaza (daily 9am–1pm & 2.30–6.30pm; mobile ⓣ02/72505402), which usually has a selection of fliers and maps of the town and can give advice in Spanish on accommodation and the attractions of Coroico and the surrounding area. The gregarious guides formerly ran the tour agency *Vagantes Eco-Aventuras*, and still offer a full programme of activities including hikes up nearby Cerro Uchamachi and down to the Rio Vagantes in the valley below. They can also organize excursions by 4WD to Afro-Yungueño villages like Tocaña and Mururata, plus visits to a new eco-tourism project, *El Paraiso del Tunqui*, near Chairo (see p.167). There's also a tourist office in the new bus station (daily 9am–noon & 2.30–6.30pm), although in reality the chance of actually finding it staffed is hit or miss.

Accommodation

For a small town, Coroico has an impressive range of **places to stay**, aimed primarily at visitors from La Paz. At weekends and on public holidays everywhere gets very full and prices go up, so it's worth booking in advance. Conversely, things are pretty quiet midweek (and in low season), when prices are much more reasonable. Even if you're on a tight budget, it's worth spending a little more to stay somewhere comfortable with a swimming pool, as you may end up spending a lot of your time lounging around it.

Hostal Kory P. Linares ⓣ02/71564050, ⓦwww.hostalkory.com. You'll probably hear the hubbub from *Kory*'s huge pool (also open to non-guests from 10am–6pm; $1.25) before you see it, but there's no quibbling with the incredible views, whether from parquet-floored, private-bathrooms, scrappy concrete terrace or lip of the pool itself. Upper, shared-bathrooms are simpler, cheaper and more characterful. ③–④

Hostal Restaurante El Cafétal Beside the hospital about a 10min walk southeast of the town centre ⓣ02/71933979, ⓔdanycafetal@hotmail.com. If you feel like flopping straight into bed after one of their famous meals, this friendly, French-run institution also offers accommodation in bamboo-furnished rooms with splendid views and a gratifyingly earthy aroma. The cheaper "backpacker" rooms are smaller but still have great views, and there's also a pool with a few forlorn-looking deckchairs. ②–③

Hostal Sol y Luna Just under 1km outside town uphill on Julio Zuazo Cuenca, beyond the *Hotel Esmeralda* ⓣ02/71561626, ⓦwww.solyluna-bolivia.com. A veritable enchanted forest of a retreat to which the prefix *Hostal* scarcely does justice, *Sol y Luna* has to be one of the most charming hideaways in the country. Sprightly, welcoming proprietress Sigrid Fronius presides over seven delightful rustic cabins and three apartments, most situated in discreet seclusion at the end of winding, subtropical paths, and all fitted with electricity, hammocks, and cooking and washing facilities. The whitewash and thatch of the older, Spanish-style cottages contrasts with newer, more environmentally integrated additions like *Jajata* (all are individually named), an amazing, Beni-style platform treehouse open to the elements. Up to seven people can be accommodated in the largest cabin, but if you're after a specific choice (check out the website), it's advisable to book in advance. There are also several simple, inexpensive rooms (②–④), a highly desirable, slate-lined outdoor hot tub, camping space ($2 per person), restaurant and rarefied bamboo meditation hall. A taxi from town costs about $2. ③–⑤

Hostal Uchumachi Next to the tourist information on the plaza ⓣ02/2899364. Endless lines of laundry and Latino bustle make this a characterful budget option, with simple pastel-yellow rooms a stone's throw from the main plaza. The same owner is also behind the soon-to-open *Agrohotel Matsu*, a great-value agriturismo venture perched on a hill above Coroico (ⓣ02/70692219, ⓔagrohotelmatsu@hotmail.com; ③), with cool blue rooms, sun-kissed balconies and spectacular views. Organic meat and veggie food is promised, as are horse-riding excursions. ①

Hotel Bella Vista Heroes Del Chaco, two blocks north of the plaza ⓣ02/2136059. The most stylish Bolivian-owned place in town, with verdant, faux-colonial decor, towering ceilings (and windows, with inspirational views to match) and a contemporary twist. All rooms come with private bath, dining-size table and loads of storage space. There's also a colourful Afro-funky mural in reception depicting the oppression and emancipation of black slaves, with the Bible – and its conquistadorial guardians – placed pointedly at its centre. ④

Hotel Cerro Verde Ayacucho 5037, two blocks west of the plaza ⓣ02/71218289 or 72027966, ⓔcerro_verde_bolivia@hotmail.com. Exceedingly friendly if slightly run-down concrete option on the western edge of town. Views are predictably magnificent, with clean, tile-floored rooms (all with private bath) set around a reasonable-sized pool and scruffy but pleasant gardens, representing decent value on balance, especially as breakfast is included. ③

Hotel Don Quijote About 1km outside town on the road to Coripata ⓣ02/2136007, ⓔhoteldonquijote@hotmail.com. A long, stables-like bungalow hotel whose net-curtained rooms are dark but gratifyingly cool. Out front there's a bar, restaurant, spacious swimming pool and an uninterrupted horizon, making it popular with Bolivian weekenders and foreign tour groups alike. Breakfast included. ③

Hotel El Viejo Molino 1km from town on the road to Caranavi ⓣ02/2797329. Isolated on the far northeastern fringe of town and occasionally cut off completely by landslides, this perfectly perched top-end option certainly has an air of exclusivity about it, even if the needlessly carpeted rooms are slightly musty and the undersized windows squander the views. Its saving grace is its large pool and restaurant with wraparound vistas, and – providing Coroico's climate hasn't reduced you to a sweaty blob already – you can also use the free sauna. Breakfast included. ⑤

Hotel Esmeralda 400m above town up Julio Zuazo Cuenca ⓣ02/22136017, ⓕ02/22136041, ⓦwww.hotelesmeralda.com. Large but peaceful German-owned hotel with great views across the valley, an attractive garden and swimming pool, and a reasonable restaurant with a $3, gringo-friendly all-day buffet. The more expensive rooms have private baths and impressively robust bamboo balconies; the cheaper ones have neither and are rather cramped. There's also table football, high-speed Internet and breakfast with a classical music soundtrack. If their free transfer service (look for the 4WD with the *Hotel Esmeralda* sign on top) isn't there to pick you up from the plaza or bus terminal, they'll rather generously refund a taxi fare. ④–⑤

Hotel Gloria Linares Ⓣ02/2407070, Ⓕ02/2406622. Another pan-tiled ex-Prefectural with the obligatory air of distinguished dilapidation and listlessness, magnified by an edge-of-town, end-of-the-road location (just by the new bus station). Actually, the more expensive rooms are surprisingly bright and pleasant, with en-suite bath, though cheaper ones are gloomy and share too few bathrooms. There are amazing views too, a modest swimming pool (which non-guests can use for $2), table football, and a bar and restaurant. Breakfast included. ④

Hotel Jazmines 1km before Coroico on the main road, Ⓣ02/2229967, Ⓦwww.jazmineshotel.com. If you have money to burn and you don't actually want to stay in Coroico itself, the garish *Jazmines* offers detached faux-Swiss chalets accommodating up to eight people. They don't have much style, and the climate's already starting to take its toll on them, but they do have great views and the bare-raftered attic rooms are cute enough. Your fellow guests will be wealthy Bolivians living it up for the weekend, loud, grating music and all. ⑥–⑨

Residencial de La Torre Julio Zuazo Cuenca (no phone). Very basic but clean rooms with shared bath, set around a bright central courtyard, popular with Bolivians. ①

Villa Bonita 100m past *Hotel Bella Vista* on the road to Caranavi, Ⓣ02/71922917, ⒺVilla_Bonita05@yahoo.com. Amidst the informal, familial and horizontally laid-back environs of their home and leafy garden (also site of their great café), friendly Bolivian-Swiss couple Ninfa and Gianni have three lovely, wooden-shuttered rooms for rent, as well as a four-berth cabin (① per person). All are welcome, although guests sympathetic to yoga and meditation are especially appreciated, with Ninfa leading free classes nightly at 8.30pm. ②

Eating and drinking

There's no lack of variety when it comes to **places to eat**, including some good European-owned places where you can find everything from pizza and Mexican food to quality French cuisine, German pastries and even Swiss fondue. There are also a number of seemingly interchangeable places around the plaza – all with mandatory rustic sign – serving inexpensive standard Bolivian food and reasonable breakfasts. As always, the best-value places are the food stalls in the **Mercado Municipal**, a block south of the main plaza on Sagárnaga; there's also a cheap **Comedor Municipal** and assorted nocturnal food stalls on Héroes Del Chaco, just north of the plaza. During the week, **nightlife** tends to involve drinking beer in the town's bar-restaurants or poolside in the better hotels. At weekends, however, several bars (the cosy, French-Bolivian owned *Taurus Pub*, opposite *La Casa*, is a good bet) and a first-floor disco – *Deidad Luz*, opposite *Hotel Bella Vista* – cater for the many young visiting Paceños, who also fill the plaza, drinking on the streets accompanied by the blaring stereos of their 4WDs.

Back-Stube Pasteleria Alemana Plaza Principal. German café-bakery serving excellent soups, snacks, sandwiches and salads, and deliciously decadent home-made cakes, with a wonderful trellised terrace affording yet more amazing views. Closed Mon afternoon and Tues.

Bamboo's Café Iturralde. Candlelit hideaway, open in the evenings for reasonable Mexican food like burritos and enchiladas at about $3 a plate, as well as ice-cold beers and mean margaritas. It's open late, often with a fairly raucous gringo crowd, and there's live music at weekends, as well as great salsa and jazz the rest of the time.

La Casa Julio Zuazo Cuenca, two blocks east of the plaza, Ⓣ02/73080445. Akin to a continental sitting room, complete with cuckoo clock and cheesy European jigsaw scenes, this German-run restaurant serves authentic cheese, meat or chicken fondues for a minimum of two people at about $4 each (the chocolate version is a very reasonable $1.20). They also offer other European dishes like raclette and goulash, although service can be surly.

Esmeralda In the hotel of the same name, 400m from the plaza up Julio Zuazo Cuenca Ⓣ02/22136017, Ⓦwww.hotelesmeralda.com. Efficient restaurant with indoor and outdoor seating and great views. Food includes good breakfasts, a wide range of meat, fish and vegetarian main courses, plus a salad bar, a filling set *almuerzo* and decent pizza on Tuesday and Friday nights.

Hostal Restaurante El Cafetal Beside the hospital about a 10min walk southeast of the town centre Ⓣ02/71933979. Justly renowned, great-value French-run restaurant with panoramic views and delicious snacks and meals, including excellent pasta (you'll struggle to find a tastier, more generously proportioned veggie lasagne in all Bolivia), crêpes, soufflés, omelettes and, of course, French onion soup, as well as llama goulash, lamb madras and fresh portabello mushrooms (mains coming in at $4–5). All that's missing is the French wine, although Tarija supplies a fine substitute, and the pungent coffee, thatch-roofed atmospherics (best sampled at night) and general conviviality more than make up for it. Closed Tues.

Villa Bonita 100m past *Hotel Bella Vista* on the road to Caranavi. Idyllic, intimate little garden café serving mouthwatering artesan ice cream and sorbet using local ingredients like *hierba buena*. While they no longer serve Thai and Indian food, the menu does include lentil burgers, sandwiches and pasta. Service couldn't be friendlier, while the soundtrack revolves around ethnic beats and reggae.

Listings

Banks and exchange Prodem, on the north side of the plaza, changes US dollars and gives pricey 5 percent advances on Visa. Several hotels will change traveller's cheques: try the *Esmeralda* or *Kory*.

Horses You can hire horses for about $6 an hour from El Relincho (Ⓣ02/71923814 or 71913675), about a 10min walk beyond the *Hotel Esmeralda* on the road to the *Hostal Sol y Luna*.

Hospital about a 10min walk southeast of the town centre along Pacheco. For emergencies call Ⓣ02/22136002 9 (24 hours).

Internet access Various Internet cafés – two of which are on the plaza – offer a predictably slow satellite connection for a standard $0.75 per hour, although the *Hotel Esmeralda* comes in slightly cheaper.

Language lessons The amiable and ubiquitous Siria Leon Domínguez (Ⓣ02/71955431, Ⓔsiria_leon@yahoo.com) offers private Spanish lessons for $4 per hour, with basic courses lasting a week at two hours a day; she can usually be found in *Hostal Sol y Luna*. Chilean expat Claudia Alvarez (Ⓣ02/71907301, ⒺClaudiaalvar@yahoo.com) also offers one-to-one tuition ($5 per hour) as well as group sessions ($4.50 per hour).

Laundry A nameless laundry opposite *Hotel Gloria* charges a very reasonable $0.12 per item of clothing.

Post office The post office is on the Plaza, next to tourist information, though it's only open irregularly (closed all day Mon) and you're better off sending letters when you get back to La Paz.

Telephone office The ENTEL office is on the north side of the Plaza.

Tour operators Alongside the multifarious La Paz agencies handling the "death road" mountain-bike trip, local operator Cross Country Coroico, Pacheco 2058 (Ⓣ02/71273015, Ⓦwww.mtbbolivia.com) was one of the first to ply the route, and it also offers a wide range of less infamous but equally challenging rides, as well as less taxing flat-road trips for beginners with plenty of scope for appreciating the area's wildlife and waterfalls. The La Paz-based agency Explore Bolivia runs white-water rafting trips on the Río Coroico – contact them in advance in La Paz (see p.30) or ask at the tourist information office on the plaza.

Around Coroico

There are some excellent hikes in the countryside around Coroico, the most popular being the climb up to the summit of **Cerro Uchumachi**, the hill that rises above the town, which takes about two hours there and back. To reach the summit, continue uphill beyond the *Hotel Esmeralda* along the clear path, marked by the Stations of the Cross, that leads to the small chapel of El Calvario. From the red-and-white antenna behind the chapel an easy-to-follow path climbs through low, dense vegetation to the summit, which is marked by three wooden crosses. With excellent views over the town and across the valley to the jagged peaks of the Cordillera Real, it's no surprise that this is the preferred spot for locals to pay homage to the *achachilas* (mountain gods), and you'll see signs of alcohol libations and burnt offerings all around the summit. When the weather closes in, the whole peak quickly becomes shrouded in cloud and the views disappear. Each year on June 21 a lot of people camp on Cerro Uchumachi, celebrating the Aymara New Year and winter solstice by watching the sun rise over the mountain peaks to the west.

Another good hike is to the **waterfalls** (*cascadas*) that are Coroico's main water source – a three- to four-hour walk there and back. From El Calvario

Moving on from Coroico

Regular micros (roughly every hour) and minibuses (every 2–4hrs) to **La Paz** are operated by Flota Yungueña and Turbus Totai respectively, departing from the new bus station. It's worth buying a ticket in advance, especially at weekends, and also worth travelling by day, both for safety and to enjoy the spectacular views. If you're heading north into the Amazon, you can buy a ticket on a through bus to **Rurrenabaque** from La Paz at the office of Trans Palmeras in the terminal; buses pass through Yolosa on the main road every day. You'll have to pay the full fare from La Paz, but in return you get a guaranteed seat for the arduous ride (which takes at least fifteen hours) and inclusive taxi ride from the bus terminal to Yolosa. Alternatively, you can flag down any through bus (1–2 daily) or truck at the police checkpoint (*tranca*) in Yolosa, though there's no guarantee you'll find a seat on a bus, while travelling by truck makes for an even longer and rougher ride.

If you're feeling adventurous, or just can't stand the thought of fifteen hours flaying your behind on a bus, you might want to consider travelling to Rurrenabaque by boat. La Paz tour operator Deep Rainforest, on the ground floor of *Hotel Continental*, Illampu 626 (Ⓣ02/71534309, Ⓦwww.deep-rainforest.com), offers weekly dry-season departures from Coroico via Guanay, where onward travel is via the Mapiri river. The three-day trip includes cloud and rainforest walks, piranha fishing and opportunities to support local communities, while the all-inclusive $120 price covers camping, bottled water and food.

Getting a ride on a bus (hourly; 2–3hr) or truck to **Caranavi** from Yolosa is easier, as they pass by more regularly. If you don't fancy paying a private taxi fare to **Yolosa**, jump on one of the pick-up trucks that leave from outside the market on Sagárnaga when full – usually every fifteen minutes or so.

If you want to go to **Chulumani** from Coroico by public transport you'll need to head back to **Unduavi**, where the roads to the north and south Yungas divide, and catch a through bus from La Paz to Chulumani. This is a shame, as the more direct route via the town of **Coripata** passes through a beautiful valley that is the coca-growing heartland of the Yungas. Unfortunately, the Coroico–Coripata road is currently in such poor condition that it isn't served by regular public transport, though if you ask around in Coroico you may find a truck or *camioneta* covering part of the thirty-kilometre or so route to Coripata. If you're feeling adventurous, and are equipped to camp if necessary, you could then walk the rest of the way. Basic accommodation and meals are available in Coripata, from where there's regular transport back to La Paz and on to Chulumani.

chapel, follow the path to your left as you face uphill; this leads around the hillside to the *cascadas*. More difficult to follow but equally rewarding is the path that heads down into the valley to the **Río Coroico** from beside the football pitch. After about an hour's walk downhill the path hits the main road to Caranavi; turn right and you'll soon reach **Puente Mururata**, a bridge over the stream of the same name, upstream of which there are some pools where you can swim in the cool, clear waters. From the other side of Puente Mururata a path climbs to the left of the road to the peaceful Afro-Yungueño village of **Tocaña**, about a twenty-minute walk away.

Chulumani and the South Yungas

From Unduavi on the road from La Paz to the Yungas, a side road heads east off the main highway towards the provincial capital of **CHULUMANI**, providing a dramatic ride as it plunges down from the high Andes into the lush vegetation of the Yungas, though it's neither as spectacular nor as dangerous as the road to Coroico. Chulumani itself is far less frequently visited than Coroico, though its setting – amidst beautiful countryside at an elevation of 1640m, on a steep hillside overlooking a broad river valley – is equally scenic. Today Chulumani is a friendly and bustling little town, and though some locals have attempted to turn it into a resort like Coroico, it's never really caught on as a retreat for wealthy Paceños; even at weekends it doesn't get particularly busy. With its palm-shaded plaza and steep, dusty and narrow cobbled streets, lined with scruffy houses with red-tiled roofs, Chulumani is a typical Yungas town, and makes a perfect base for exploring the surrounding countryside. It's now the capital of the Sur Yungas province and the market centre for an extensive rural hinterland, though in the 1950s it was notorious as a hideout for fugitive Nazi war criminals, such as Klaus Barbie, the "Butcher of Lyon", who some people say once sold fruit juices on the plaza.

Buses from La Paz arrive outside the bus offices on Plaza Libertad, the main square. There's no tourist information office, but Javier Sarabia, owner of the *Hostal Country House*, can give useful advice on hikes from Chulumani; he also runs guided excursions and camping trips on foot or by jeep and can arrange bicycle and motorbike rental.

Practicalities

The selection of **places to eat** in Chulumani is disappointing, and the better places are usually open only at weekends. There are decent restaurants in both the *Monarcha* and *Panorama* hotels, serving standard main courses including fresh local trout, although finding them open is another matter; even if you're a guest, they'll usually require some notice, at least in low season. You could take your chances with the various, none-too-salubrious-looking establishments on the plaza, including the prominent *Restaurant Miguel Angel*, but by far the best bet for a fresh egg roll, hamburger or fruit juice is *Cafetería Dely's*, just south of the plaza. In the comfort of a cool, pine-fresh and spotlessly clean interior you can watch your food getting cooked while you wait. There are also a couple of more flyblown **snack bars** on the plaza where you can get cold drinks, sandwiches, fried chicken and ice cream. Just east of the plaza on Calle Lanza the **market** offers the usual fruit juices and simple meals, and there's also a series of unexciting food stalls by the *tranca* on the road out of town to the north.

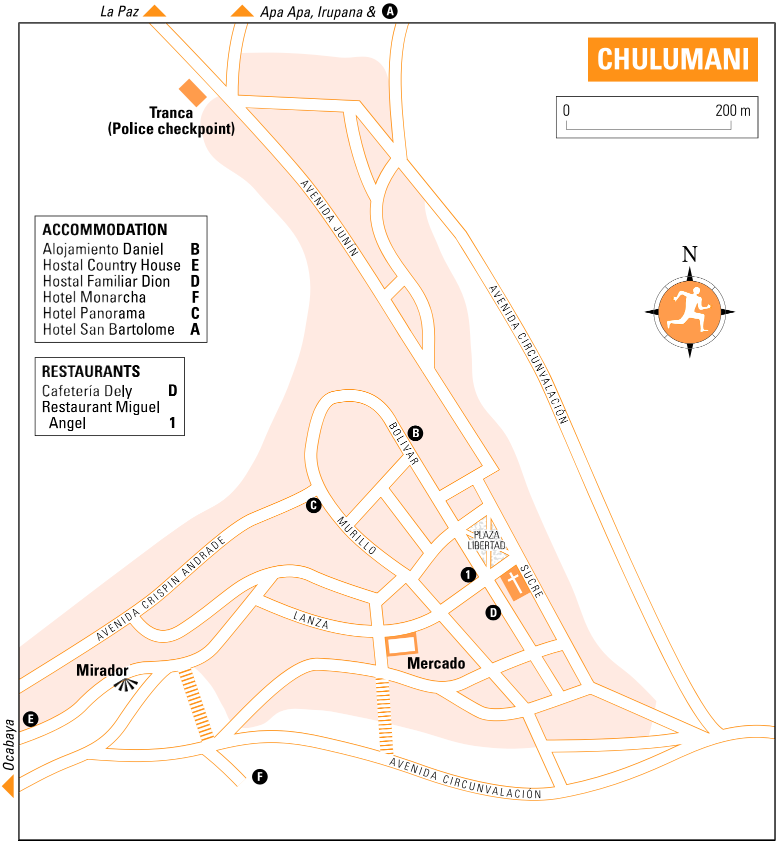
Accommodation options are also rather limited. Apart from the *Hostal Country House*, it comes down to a choice between budget *alojamientos* and rather overpriced hotels with swimming pools aimed at weekenders from La Paz. You can also stay outside town at the delightful Bosque Ecológico Apa Apa (see p.177).

Alojamiento Daniel Uphill from the plaza on Bolívar ☎02/2136359. Simple but clean rooms with rough-hewn pink walls and a choice of shared or private bath; those upstairs have balconies and great views. The friendly staff is also a bonus. ①–②

Hostal Country House 1km southeast of town beyond the Mirador (no phone). Bohemian little guesthouse with a welcoming, old-friend feel and funky, lived-in rooms (with private bath) around an eccentric garden with a psychedelic swimming pool. Walls and shelves are crammed with old wine bottles, magazines, books, art, textiles, pressed insects and random newspaper articles. The helpful English-speaking owner Javier Sarabia is a mine of information, serves homemade food (veggies well catered for) and organizes guided excursions. ③

Hostal Familiar Dion Southwest of the plaza; entry through the adjoining *Cafetería Dely's* ☎02/2136070. Run by genial middle-aged sisters, this homely *hostal* consists of well-scrubbed, unassuming rooms ringing a flowery courtyard. Bathrooms are ensuite and windows are screened. ③

Hotel Monarca Below the town on Av Circumvalación ☎02/22136121. A friendly, holiday camp-style ex-Prefectural with an Alcatraz-like front gate, this place is like a trip to the 1950s. Scrubby paths wind between prim, parquet-floored, net-curtained chalets (with fans and private


La Paz
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Hostal Familiar Dion D
Hotel Monarcha F
Hotel Panorama C
Hotel San Bartolome A
RESTAURANTS
Cafetería Dely D
Restaurant Miguel Angel 1
AVENIDA JUNIN
AVENIDA CIRCUNVALACIÓN
BOLIVAR
MURILLO
PLAZA LIBERTAD
SUCRE
AVENIDA CRISPIN ANDRADE
LANZA
Mirador
Mercado
Ocabaya
AVENIDA CIRCUNVALACIÓN
B
C
1
D
E
F

bathrooms) looking out onto a huge swimming pool that's seen better days (accessible to non-guests for $2). There's also a bar and a good restaurant (plenty of notice required). Breakfast included. ④

Hotel Panorama Murillo ☎02/2136109. Although the place often looks closed altogether (entrance round the back) and is a little down at the heel, the simple, screened, whitewashed rooms (all with private bath) just off the garden are among the most rustically atmospheric (and hot, if not unbearably so) in town. Rooms in the main building are more colonial in style with wooden floors. There's a reasonable restaurant, and the somewhat scruffy but charming garden – with lurid flowers, fruit trees and admittedly slightly grimy swimming pool – makes a great place for an al fresco beer or meal. The staff is friendly if eccentric, and breakfast is included. ③

Hotel San Bartolome 2km from town on the Irupana road ☎02/72514779. Under the same management as La Paz's swanky *Hotel Radisson Plaza*, this veteran out-of-town retreat has ten cosy bird's-eye-view cabins (up to six people) with 1970s furniture, as well as a row of ten bungalow-style rooms styled in similar retro fashion. The place also boasts the nicest pool in Chulumani, a jocular German manager and a grand old map of Bolivia. Breakfast included. ⑥–⑧

Around Chulumani

The main attraction of Chulumani is the opportunity to explore the peaceful hamlets, splendid scenery and exuberant tropical vegetation of the surrounding countryside. Many of the steep surrounding mountain slopes have been sculpted over centuries into neat terraces covered in bright-green coca bushes, while the fertile valley floor is a patchwork of coffee and orange groves where flowers and hummingbirds abound. The best day-trip is to the Bosque Ecológico Apa Apa (see below), but almost any path leading out of town makes for a good hike: try following the path that climbs up the ridge behind the town – the views get better the higher you ascend. Alternatively, follow the path that runs from the *Mirador* a few blocks east of the plaza down to the village of **Ocabaya** on the valley floor; a three- to four-hour walk.

From Chulumani, a road runs northeast, past the Bosque Ecológico Apa Apa, before curving south to reach the picturesque colonial village of **Irupana**, 15km away on the other side of the valley, which is served by occasional *camionetas* from Chulumani (as well as micros from La Paz). From Irupana you can visit **Pasto Grande**, an area of extensive but largely overgrown Inca agricultural terracing a couple of hours' walk away. Further afield you can reach the coca-growing centre of **Coripata**, about 35km north of Chulumani, by heading back along the road to La Paz as far as the turn-off at Puente Villa, where you can pick up through traffic. There's basic food and accommodation available in Coripata, and you may be able to find a *camioneta* travelling along the scenic but very rough road to Coroico, 30km away.

Bosque Ecológico Apa Apa

Comprising five square kilometres of the dense and humid montane forest that once covered most of the Yungas, **Bosque Ecológico Apa Apa** (ⓣ&ⓕ02/2136106, ⓔapapayungas@hotmail.com), 9km from Chulumani on the road to Irupana, is a private nature reserve whose dense vegetation stands in stark contrast to the deforested slopes of the surrounding mountainsides. The kindly Bolivian-American family that owns the reserve runs **tours** ($5 per person; minimum of five people) led by informative English-speaking guides along trails running into the forest. Tours last three to four hours and you're likely to see a great variety of bird life including hummingbirds and flocks of parrots; if you're lucky you may even spot deer or monkeys, while pumas and spectacled bears are known to inhabit the higher reaches. The family also rents out clean, comfortable **rooms** (15) in the delightful old hacienda that is their home and the centre of a working farm, a bustling place where mangoes litter the ground and a monstrous Great Dane dog holds court. Guests – most of whom, strangely enough, are Bolivian – can also use the lovely, spotlessly clean swimming pool, while the café (where the inclusive breakfast is served) is worth the trek for the delicious homemade ice cream alone. There's also a bucolic, fully equipped but expensive **campsite** ($10 per tent), complete with hot showers and cooking facilities, as well as a thatched long-house style hut. The owners will pick you up from Chulumani if you contact them in advance; otherwise, to get to the reserve you'll need to walk or take a taxi ($3); try Delfin Murillo Rios (ⓣ02/72554386; 24 hrs). It's 9km along the road leading out of Chulumani to the northeast, then another 2km or so up the marked turn-off to the left to reach the hacienda.

Travel details

Buses and micros

Charazani to: La Paz (1–2 daily; 10hr).
Chulumani to: La Paz (hourly; 4hr 30min).
Copacabana to: La Paz (every 30min; 3hr 30min).
Coroico to: La Paz (every 30min; 3hr).
Desaguadero to: La Paz (every 30min; 3hr).
La Paz to: Charazani (1–2 daily; 10hr); Chulumani (every hour; 4hr 30min); Copacabana (every 30min; 3hr 30min); Coroico (every 30min; 4hr 30min); Desaguadero (every 30min; 3hr); Pelechuco (4 weekly; 15–18hr); Sorata (hourly; 4hr 30 min).
Pelechuco to La Paz: (4 weekly; 15–18hr).
Sorata to: La Paz (hourly; 4hr 30min).

3

The southern Altiplano

N
BRAZIL
PERU
CHILE
PARAGUAY
ARGENTINA
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4
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6

CHAPTER 3 Highlights

✱ **Oruro Carnaval** One of the most colourful and uproarious folkloric fiestas in all South America, featuring thousands of dancers in extravagant devil costumes. See p.186

✱ **Casa Real de la Moneda** The monumental former royal mint in Potosí houses Bolivia's best museum, including some of the finest colonial religious art in the country. See p.204

✱ **Churches of Potosí** The legendary silver-mining city of Potosí has some of the most outstanding Spanish colonial churches in the Americas. See p.210

✱ **Cerro Rico** A journey through the labyrinthine tunnels of the Cerro Rico mines above Potosí offers the chance to witness working conditions of incredible harshness, as well as the bizarre customs and beliefs that help the miners survive them. See p.218

✱ **Salar de Uyuni** Perhaps Bolivia's most extraordinary landscape, featuring the world's biggest salt lake – a vast expanse of dazzling white surrounded by high mountain peaks. See p.221

✱ **Reserva de Fauna Andina Eduardo Avaroa** This remote and spectacular region of icebound volcanic peaks and mineral-stained lakes is home to a surprising array of wildlife, including great flocks of pink flamingos and herds of vicuñas. See p.225

✱ **Tarija** Enjoy the wine from the world's highest vineyards in the self-styled Andalucía of Bolivia, a charming colonial town in a warm Andean valley that feels a world apart from the rest of the country. See p.238

▲ Playing soccer on the Salar de Uyuni

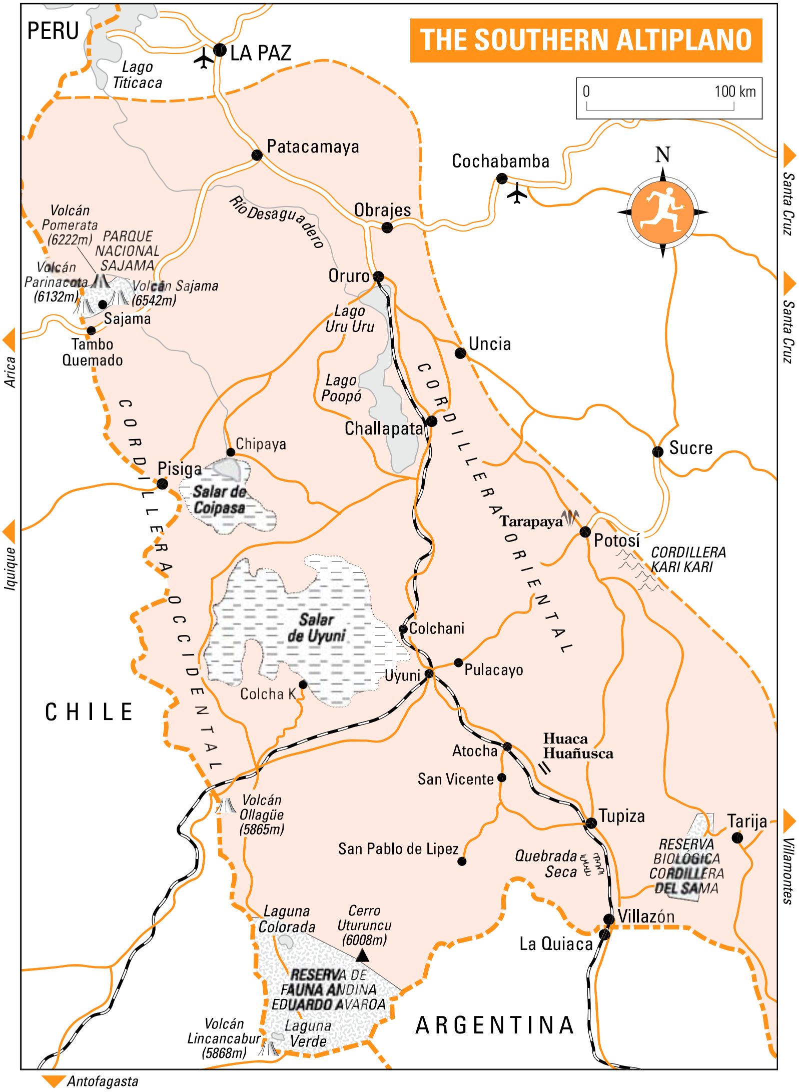
3

The southern Altiplano

South of La Paz, the **southern Altiplano** – the high plateau that lies between the eastern and western chains of the Andes – stretches 800km to the Chilean and Argentine borders, a bleak, rolling plain, swept by unforgiving winds and illuminated by a harsh sunshine that seems to leach all colour from the earth without warming the rarefied air. Set at an average altitude of around 3700m, this starkly beautiful landscape is the image most frequently associated with Bolivia: a barren and treeless expanse whose arid steppes stretch to the horizon, where snowcapped mountains shimmer under deep-blue skies. With scant rainfall and infertile soils, the southern Altiplano supports only a sparse rural population: traversing its lonely expanse you'll see occasional clusters of huts in the distance whose adobe walls seem to merge into the brown earth. These are home to hardy Aymara communities, which scrape a marginal living by growing tubers and grains and herding llamas and alpacas, using survival techniques that have served them for centuries.

The Altiplano was formed millions of years ago by sediments washed down from the mountains, filling the deep valley that formed between the two Andean chains – the cordilleras Oriental and Occidental – as they were pushed up from the sea bed. Hemmed in on both sides by these high mountain ranges, the Altiplano is actually a closed basin: what little rain falls here never reaches the sea; instead, it collects in shallow lakes and saltpans where it slowly evaporates. Since the Spanish conquest, the Altiplano's prime importance has lain in the rich **mineral deposits** found in the Cordillera Oriental, the mountain range on its eastern edge. Mines established here to exploit first silver and then tin were for centuries the basis of the Bolivian economy, and the two biggest cities in the region are both formerly rich mining centres fallen on hard times.

The unavoidable transport nexus of the Altiplano is the unattractive tin-mining city of **Oruro**, 230km south of La Paz, a grim monument to industrial decline – its spectacular Carnaval celebrations are now the only reminder of its former wealth and power. West of Oruro, a chain of snowcapped volcanic peaks – the Cordillera Occidental – marks the border with Chile and the edge of the Altiplano. One of these peaks, **Sajama**, is the tallest mountain in Bolivia and centre of the eponymous national park – the country's oldest – which is easily visited from La Paz. Some 310km further southeast of Oruro is the legendary silver-mining city of **Potosí**. Once the richest jewel in the Spanish empire,


THE SOUTHERN ALTIPLANO
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PERU
LA PAZ
Lago Titicaca
Patacamaya
Cochabamba
Santa Cruz
Santa Cruz
Obrajes
Río Desaguadero
Volcán Pomerata (6222m)
PARQUE NACIONAL SAJAMA
Volcán Parinacota (6132m)
Volcán Sajama (6542m)
Sajama
Tambo Quemado
Arica
Oruro
Lago Uru Uru
Uncia
Lago Poopó
Challapata
CORDILLERA ORIENTAL
CORDILLERA OCCIDENTAL
Chipaya
Pisiga
Salar de Coipasa
Iquique
Sucre
Tarapaya
Potosí
CORDILLERA KARI KARI
Salar de Uyuni
Colchani
Pulacayo
Uyuni
Colcha K
CHILE
Atocha
Huaca Huañusca
San Vicente
Volcán Ollagüe (5865m)
Tupiza
Tarija
Villamontes
San Pablo de Lipez
RESERVA BIOLÓGICA CORDILLERA DEL SAMA
Quebrada Seca
Villazón
Laguna Colorada
Cerro Uturuncu (6008m)
La Quiaca
RESERVA DE FAUNA ANDINA EDUARDO AVAROA
ARGENTINA
Volcán Lincancabur (5868m)
Laguna Verde
Antofagasta

it's now a city of sublime colonial architecture, marooned at 4100m above sea level and filled with monuments to a glorious but tragic past.

The Altiplano grows more desolate still as it stretches south towards the Argentine border. From the forlorn railway town of **Uyuni**, 323km due south of Oruro by road and rail, you can venture into the dazzling white **Salar de Uyuni**, the world's biggest salt lake, whose otherworldly beauty has made it one of Bolivia's best-known scenic attractions. Beyond the Salar in the far south-western corner of the country is the **Reserva de Fauna Andina Eduardo Avaroa**, a nature reserve that encompasses a landscape of such unremitting bleakness that at times it's difficult to believe it could support any life at all. Despite appearances, however, this remote region of high-altitude deserts, surreal wind-blasted rock formations, icebound volcanic peaks and half-frozen mineral-stained lakes is home to a surprising array of wildlife, including great flocks of pink flamingos and herds of vicuñas.

Southwest of Uyuni the Altiplano changes character. The pleasant little mining town of **Tupiza** is surrounded by arid red mountains and cactus-strewn badlands eroded into deep gullies and rock pinnacles, a region which many travellers compare to the deserts of the southwest US. Different again is the provincial capital of **Tarija**, in the far south of the country, a remote and welcoming city set in a deep and fertile valley that enjoys a much warmer climate than the Altiplano, and which is known as the Andalucía of Bolivia for its many similarities to southern Spain.

The region is bitterly **cold** at night, with temperatures often falling well below zero, particularly between May and July. Even during the day temperatures can drop sharply when the sun slips behind a cloud, and the wind-chill makes things colder still – although you'll also need to protect yourself from the fierce, high-altitude sunshine. In addition to the harshness of the natural environment, **travel** around the region is painfully slow, given that none of the roads south of Oruro is paved, although the trains which run between Oruro and Villazón on the Argentine border offer a faster and more comfortable alternative.

Parque Nacional Sajama

Southwest of La Paz, the road to Chile passes through some of the Altiplano's starkest scenery, a desert plain almost totally devoid of vegetation presided over by the perfect snowcapped cone of **Volcán Sajama**. At 6542m, Sajama is the highest mountain in Bolivia, and the first in a chain of icebound volcanic peaks known as the Cordillera Occidental that straddle the Chilean border and mark the edge of the Altiplano – although Sajama stands alone, separated by some distance from the rest of the range. Sajama is also the centre of Bolivia's oldest national park, the **PARQUE NACIONAL SAJAMA**, which was established in 1939 to protect the local population of **vicuñas**, a wild Andean relative of the llama which has been hunted to the verge of extinction for its highly prized wool. The park covers roughly one thousand square kilometres, encompassing the entire mountain as well as a large area of the surrounding desert, where pumas, rare Andean deer and flightless, ostrich-like rheas are also found – though rarely seen. The slopes of Sajama also support the highest forest in the world, a patch of hardy **queñua** trees that survive up to an amazing 5200m. The records don't stop there: in 2001 the highest football match in the world was played in the crater at the top of Sajama – the game, between local villagers and mountain guides from La Paz, ended in a draw.

Most of the visitors who come to Sajama are **mountain climbers**, drawn by the chance to ascend a peak of over 6000m that requires little technical expertise – though any multi-day ascent at this altitude shouldn't be taken lightly. But the beauty of the region is such that you don't need to be a climber to enjoy a visit: the lower slopes of the mountain make for excellent **hiking**, and there are bubbling geysers and hot springs to be explored in the plain of volcanic ash that surrounds the peak. West of the park on the Chilean border, the two volcanic peaks of **Parinacota** (6132m) and **Pomerata** (6222m) provide a stunning backdrop. Known as the *payachatas*, or twins, and considered the female consorts of Sajama, these mountains can also be climbed.

▲ Volcán Sajama

At over 4200m, the desert of grey volcanic ash that surrounds the volcano is simply too dry, cold and infertile to allow agriculture, and the hardy Aymara communities that live here have traditionally depended for survival on herding llamas and alpacas, which graze on the tough grasses that grow in patches on the plain and the volcano's lower slopes. These days, the region is dotted with semi-abandoned hamlets and crumbling adobe churches, as the young turn their back on the harsh lifestyle of their parents and head to the city in search of education, modernity and an easier life, though with the emergence of a primitive tourist industry based in Sajama village at the foot of the volcano, the local economy is beginning to recover.

Visiting the park

The administrative centre of the park is the village of **SAJAMA**, a cluster of simple adobe houses and a crumbling whitewashed colonial church huddled at the foot of the volcano in a setting at once desperately bleak and stunningly beautiful. Home to just a few hundred people, the village is the place to find food, accommodation, guides and information, and you can also hire a jeep and driver to take you around if you don't want to hike.

The routes to attractions close to the village are marked with signposts and are reasonably easy to follow. One of the best hikes (3–4hr each way) is up to the **Sajama base camp** on the volcano's lower slopes, a well-marked trek that offers fantastic views of the chain of volcanoes along the Chilean border. If you want to camp there – or anywhere else in the park – you need to be prepared for very low temperatures. The **highest forest in the world** is about thirty minutes' walk up from Sajama village but, statistics aside, the stunted, slow-growing queñua trees are not overwhelmingly impressive. The **geyser field** 8km or so west of the village in the foothills of the *payachatas* is another good excursion. An easy walk (1hr 30min–2hr) along a well-defined trail, the geyser field is made up of 87 different pools of boiling water which vary in shape, size, colour and temperature. Some bubble furiously like cauldrons, and the mixture of mineral salts and algae that thrive in the warm waters creates bizarre colours, including blood reds, shiny greens and sulphurous yellows. On no account should you bathe in any of the geysers, as temperatures can change rapidly. If you do fancy a soak, there are some **aguas termales** (hot springs) about 4km north of the village, again along an easy-to-follow trail. The natural hot water is fed into an open-air pool, making it a fantastic place to wallow and relax while enjoying the matchless scenery, and an excellent way to ease aching limbs.

The park's **vicuña** population has made a dramatic recovery since the park was established, though you'll have to travel some distance to actually see them – large herds can be found grazing 25km or so north of the village at the area known as Patoca.

Mountain climbing is only allowed between April and October, when the ice is sufficiently frozen. To climb Sajama or any of the surrounding peaks you must first register with the park administration in Sajama village (see below). They can help arrange guides, mules and porters, but you'll need to bring your own equipment and supplies from outside. **Volcán Parinacota**, to the west of the park on the Chilean border, is also considered a technically simple climb and, as you can drive to the base camp, is particularly popular with climbers eager to conquer a 6000-metre peak.

Practicalities

There are two ways to reach Sajama by **public transport** from La Paz. The first is to take any Oruro-bound bus as far as the crossroads town of **Patacamaya** (every 30 min; 1hr 30min), from where micros go direct to Sajama village (several departures daily; 3hr 30min). The other way of reaching the park is to get on a bus from La Paz (2 daily; 3hr 30min–4hr) headed for Arica in Chile and alight at the turn-off to Sajama on the main road. Jeeps from the village usually wait at the turn-off to collect passengers arriving from La Paz – they charge about $6 per vehicle for the twelve-kilometre drive back to the village. Alternatively, you could walk to the village in two-and-a-half to three hours from the turn-off.

Upon arrival in Sajama village you must register at the **park office** (daily 8am–noon & 2.30–7pm; ☎0811/5260) and pay the $1.50 entrance fee. The usually helpful park rangers can answer most questions about the reserve and will help you arrange **accommodation**. Several people in the village have basic *alojamientos* (①) which are uniformly simple: cold, bare rooms with blankets on straw mattresses and outdoor toilets. In keeping with the egalitarian traditions of the Altiplano, guests are shared out, so you'll simply be allocated to one of the *alojamientos* by the park office. There are also several **places to eat** in the village, where you can get simple and inexpensive set *almuerzos*, *cenas* and breakfasts for about $1, though it's best to order a few hours in advance. Most of these places double as shops where you can choose from a limited range of beer, soft drinks and basic foodstuffs.

Crossing the Chilean border

The **Chilean border** is 9km west of the turn-off to Sajama at **Tambo Quemado**. Crossing into Chile is straightforward: there's a *migración* where you get your exit stamp and a couple of restaurants catering mainly to truck drivers. If you're coming from La Paz the bus will take you all the way through to Arica on Chile's Pacific coast, though you may want to stop off at the **Parque Nacional Lauca**, which encompasses similar scenery to the Parque Nacional Sajama. If you're heading to Chile from Sajama, you can get to the border on the 7am micro to Patacamaya, which comes to Tambo Quemado to pick up passengers, then walk across the frontier and pick up transport on the Chilean side.

The rangers at the park office can also arrange **porters**, **mules** and **guides** for people wanting to climb Sajama or one of the other volcanoes; once again, these will be allocated to you on a rota basis and charge a set price: mules, mule-handlers (*arrieros*), guides and porters each cost about $10 per day. You can also rent a **jeep** with driver if you want transport to any of the park's attractions or back to the main road to catch a bus. The drivers double as guides and charge according to a more-or-less fixed tariff for the whole vehicle regardless of the number of passengers: expect to pay about $6 to the *aguas termales* and $10 to the geysers.

Oruro

Huddled on the bleak Altiplano some 230km south of La Paz, the grim mining city of **ORURO** was the economic powerhouse of Bolivia for much of the twentieth century, centre of the country's richest **tin-mining** region and the

Dancing with the Devil: the Oruro Carnaval

A moveable feast celebrated a week before Lent each year – usually late February or early March – the **Oruro Carnaval** attracts tens of thousands of visitors who come to enjoy what is by far the most raucous and spectacular fiesta in Bolivia. During the week-long party thousands of costumed dancers parade through the streets in a vibrant and bizarre celebration of the sacred and profane that combines Christian beliefs with Andean folklore, with a good deal of heavy drinking and chaotic water-fighting thrown in for good measure. Preparations for the fiesta begin several months before Carnaval. On the first Sunday of November a special Mass is held in the Santuario del Socavón church, where dancers swear to dance at the Carnaval for three consecutive years, as dancing is considered a serious religious duty. Thereafter, rehearsals are held every Sunday leading up to Carnaval itself, so even if you miss the main event, if you're passing through Oruro on a Sunday in the preceding months you can see what all the fuss is about.

The Carnaval's main event is the **Entrada** on the Saturday before Ash Wednesday, a massive procession through the streets of the city involving more than fifty different troops of costumed dancers, each accompanied by four or five brass bands. The parade is led by a motorcade of cars and trucks festooned with silver, cheap jewellery, old coins, food and drink. Known as **cargamentos**, these floats are offerings for the Virgen del Socavón (see p.193), in whose honour the Carnaval is held. Behind them comes the dance that is the Carnaval's central feature: the **Diablada**, or Dance of the Devils. It is led by two lavishly costumed dancers representing Lucifer and St Michael, followed by hundreds of devil dancers who leap and prance through the streets in brightly embroidered, multicoloured costumes, while massed brass bands pump out a thunderous, hypnotic rhythm. The dancers wear intricate masks festooned with bulging light-bulb eyes, long twisted horns, tangled hair and leering mouths, and decorated with bright mirrors and writhing with serpents and lizards. Amongst them dance smaller groups of she-devils known as *China Supay*, carnal temptresses in lascivious masks with long eyelashes and red mouths, dressed in tight costumes with short skirts and revolvers tucked into their belts. The origins and meaning of the Diablada are multiple. On one hand, the dance in its modern format is a clear morality play in which the Archangel Michael triumphs over the Devil of Christian belief. But the dance is also a celebration of the devil as an incarnation of **Huari**, the pre-Columbian god of the underworld (closely related to El Tío – see p.219) who is the owner of the mineral wealth of the mines and the jealous patron of the miners who dance in his honour.

hub of its now much-reduced railway network. Oruro owed its fortunes to the enormous mineral wealth found in the rugged, ochre-coloured mountains that rise to the east of the city. Tin mines established here in the late nineteenth century turned Oruro into a thriving modern industrial city and generated such huge fortunes for the mining magnates who owned them that they effectively ran the country. The same mines formed the crucible from which emerged the militant miners' trade union that was one of the dominant political forces in the country after the mines were nationalized in 1952. Since the fall of world tin prices in 1985, however, Oruro's fortunes have plummeted, and though it's still the biggest city in the Altiplano after La Paz and El Alto, with a population of about 170,000, more than fifteen years of economic decline have turned it into a shadow of its former self.

Situated 3709m above sea level, swept by the bitter Altiplano winds and often coated in dust from its few still-functioning mines, Oruro is a cold and rather sombre place, with the melancholic air of a city forever looking back on a golden age that is unlikely to return. This dour demeanour is deceptive,

Behind the Diablada follows a bewildering variety of other costumed dance troupes, each with its own folk history and mythology, and each trying to be noisier and more spectacular than the last. Amongst them are the **Incas**, who re-enact the Spanish conquest in a burlesque satire; the **Tobas**, whose painted faces and feathered head-dresses represent the wild tribes of the Amazon lowlands; the **Doctorcitos**, whose tailcoats and top hats with glasses and long noses are a clear satire of gringo mine owners and capitalists; and the **Morenadas**, who represent African slaves brought here during the colonial era, their tongues lolling and eyes bulging with exhaustion, shaking rattles which replicate the clanking of manacles, and dressed in great finery to represent the wealth of their masters. The procession continues well into Sunday morning, with each troupe taking its turn to dance in the plaza in front of the Santuario del Socavón in honour of the Virgin. Dancing and drinking continues for much of the following week. On Ash Wednesday, dancers and townsfolk visit a series of rocks on the outskirts of Oruro to make *ch'alla* offerings of alcohol, coca and coloured streamers to what are claimed to be the petrified remains of the giant frog, serpent and other fearsome beasts defeated by the Virgin to save the town. Finally, on Thursday, the different troupes conduct their **despedida fiestas** in private houses, saying their farewells until the following year.

Carnaval practicalities

Even though the number of Bolivian and foreign visitors coming to Oruro increases every year, you can still turn up a day or two before the Saturday Entrada and find somewhere to sleep. Though all the hotels in the city fill up well in advance and charge up to five times their normal rates, you should be able to find a bed in a private home – ask at the tourist information kiosk. The route of the main procession is lined with raised banks of benches which are rented out by the day, either by the shop or house in front of which they stand or by the Caseta de Información on the Plaza Manuel Castro de Padilla. Prices vary between about $3 and $10; the most expensive seats are on the Plaza de Armas and outside the Santuario del Socavón, where the dancers perform their most complicated routines. Even if you turn up the day before you should be able to find a seat – if it's in front of a shop that sells beer and will let you use their toilet and a tap for filling water bombs, so much the better. Other than the dancers no one is immune from water-bomb attack, and gringos are amongst the most popular targets, so be prepared to get utterly soaked – and to strike back.

however. Every year in late February or early March Oruro explodes into life, celebrating its **Carnaval** (see box, p.186) in what is without doubt one of the most spectacular cultural events in all South America. If you're anywhere near Oruro at Carnaval time, this is a fiesta that should not be missed. At any other time of year, though, there's not much reason to stop here, though given its importance as a transport hub you're almost certain to pass through the city at some stage during your travels in Bolivia. If you do decide to break a journey here, there's enough in the city and the surrounding countryside to keep you busy for a day or two.

Some history

Originally named the Villa Imperial de Don Felipe de Austria in honour of the reigning Spanish king, Felipe III, the city of Oruro was **founded** on November 1, 1606, a decade after the discovery of rich **silver** deposits in the nearby Cerro Pie de Gallo. Though its mines never rivalled those of Potosí in terms of production, Oruro grew quickly, and by the 1670s was the second biggest city in Alto Peru, with a population of about 80,000. Unlike Potosí, Oruro was denied the royal provision of forced labour through the *mita* system, and the mine owners had to rely on free labourers. The relatively high wages they paid raised production costs but also attracted great numbers of free indigenous workers and encouraged more permanent settlement than in Potosí. Oruro quickly became the largest free mine labour centre in Alto Peru, a disorderly and sometimes violent society with a thriving mestizo population.

Oruro was the biggest Spanish city to be captured during the **Great Rebellion** of 1780–81, when the city's mestizos and criollos joined the indigenous uprising led by Tupac Amaru, massacring the Spanish-born population. This unusual multi-class alliance did not last long, though: the rebel army raised from the *ayllus* of the surrounding Altiplano made little distinction between Spanish and American-born whites, and soon turned on the criollo instigators of the uprising, looting and burning their houses and killing their leader, Sebastián Pagador, before meeting the same fate themselves at the hands of the royalist army when it eventually retook the city.

Oruro changed hands several times during the long years of the **Independence War** (1809–1824). With many mines and smelters destroyed and the economy severely disrupted, the population fell below 5000 in the postwar period. This gradually recovered as silver production grew again, aided by foreign capital, improved industrial technology and the completion of a railway linking Oruro with the Pacific coast in 1892. The rail link meant Oruro was perfectly placed to exploit the growing world demand for **tin**, which was found in great abundance in the surrounding mountains. Tin production quickly became Bolivia's primary industry, and Oruro prospered.

The three Bolivian mining entrepreneurs who controlled most of the mines of Oruro – Aramayo, Hochschild and Patiño – soon came to dominate the national political scene, but in their treatment of the miners they sowed the seeds of their own downfall. The radical FSTMB mineworkers' union that emerged from the mining camps around Oruro played a key role in the 1952 revolution that led to the nationalization of the mines. But nationalization couldn't protect Bolivia from global economic forces. When the price of tin crashed in 1985, the mining industry collapsed; with it went the power of the miners' union and the economic fortunes of Oruro. The corrupt and inefficient state mining corporation was broken up, most of the mines were closed and thousands lost their jobs. Though new operations like the Inti Raymi gold mine have since opened – along with some of the tin mines, which have reopened as cooperatives – Oruro has never recovered from the collapse of tin mining and remains a shadow of its former self.

Arrival and information

Almost all long-distance **buses** pull in at the Terminal Terrestre, ten blocks northeast of the city centre on Avenida Raika Bacovick. A **taxi** into town from here should cost $0.50 per person, the flat rate for journeys within the city; alternatively, take any micro heading south along Avenida 6 de Agosto. There's a reasonably helpful **bus information office** (daily 8am–10pm; Ⓣ02/5279535) on the first floor of the terminal. The only long-distance buses that don't arrive at the terminal are those passing through from Tarija on their way to La Paz, which will drop you off on Avenida Ejército on the eastern outskirts of the city. The **train station** is a short walk east of the city centre on Avenida Galvarro at Aldana.

Surprisingly, there are two tourist information offices in Oruro. The most helpful is the **Caseta de Información** (Mon–Fri 8am–noon & 2–6:30pm; Ⓣ02/5257881) kiosk across the street from the train station, whose enthusiastic staff do their best to answer questions (in Spanish only) and can help you find somewhere to stay if you can't find a hotel room during Carnaval; they also usually have a free map and other leaflets to dish out. The **Unidad de Turismo Prefectural** (Mon–Fri 8am–noon & 2–6pm; Ⓣ052/50114), on the west side of Plaza 10 de Febrero, is less informative, and really only worth visiting if the kiosk is closed.

Accommodation

There's a fairly good range of places **to stay** in Oruro. Those around the bus terminal are obviously more convenient if you're just passing through; otherwise it's better to stay in the city centre. Everything fills up during Carnaval, when prices go up by as much as five times, and most places will only rent rooms to those who take them for the Friday, Saturday and Sunday night of the Carnaval weekend. If you can, it's best to book well in advance, but even if you arrive the day before the festivities begin you should be able to find a place to sleep in a private home – ask at the Caseta de Información.

Alojamiento San Salvador Av Galvarro 6325 Ⓣ02/5276771. The best of several inexpensive places to stay near the train station, with box-like and gloomy but clean rooms with or without bath. ②

Hotel Bernal Av Brasil 701, opposite the bus terminal Ⓣ02/5279468. A bit run-down but very good value, with decent beds, abundant hot water, Internet access and helpful, English-speaking management. ②

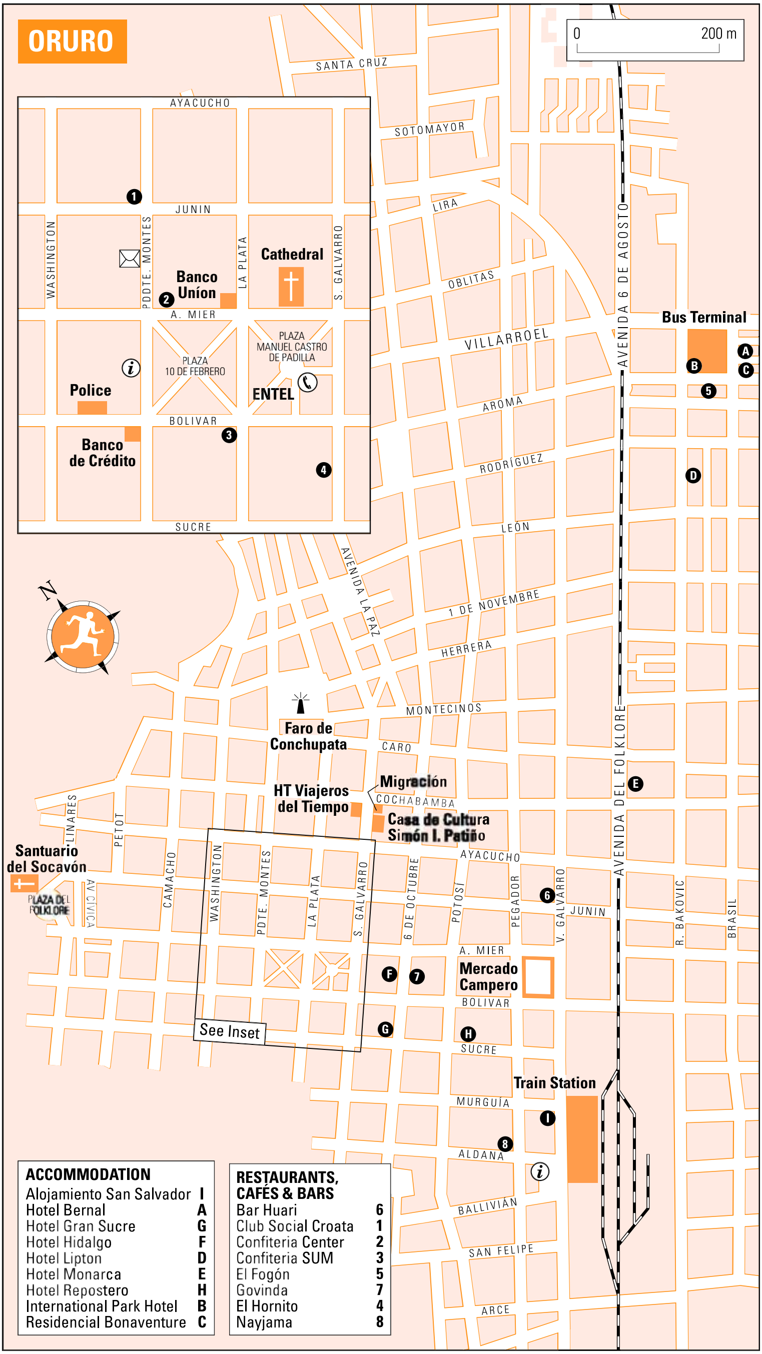
Hotel Gran Sucre Sucre 510 Ⓣ02/5276800, Ⓕ02/5254110. Characterful hotel that preserves some of the grandeur of Oruro's heyday, with elegant wood-panelled corridors and a glass-roofed ballroom where breakfast is served. The hotel offers a range of accommodation to suit most budgets, with a choice between simple but adequate rooms with shared bath or spacious, well-appointed modern rooms with private bath. ③–⑤

Hotel Hidalgo Av 6 de Octubre 1616 Ⓣ02/5257516, Ⓔehidalgo@coteor.net.bo. Modern but gloomy place with big, comfortable beds in carpeted, rather cramped rooms with or without bath and cable TV. Breakfast included. ③–④

Hotel Lipton Av 6 de Agosto and Rodriguez Ⓣ02/5276583. Convenient but uninspiring, with small but adequate rooms (with or without bath) and plenty of hot water. ②–③

Hotel Monarca Av 6 de Agosto and Av Ejército Nacional Ⓣ02/5254300, Ⓔhmonarca@nogal.oru.entelnet.bo. Modern high-rise hotel with bright, well-furnished rooms (but rather chintzy decor); some rooms have good views over the city. Breakfast in the top-floor restaurant included. ④

Hotel Repostero Sucre 370 Ⓣ02/5258001 or 5258002. A once elegant nineteenth-century building now crumbling and rather run-down, though rooms, overlooking a sunny central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POTOSÍ
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V. GALVARRO
R. BAKOVIC
BRASIL
LINARES
PETOT
CAMACHO
AV CIVICA
PLAZA DEL FOLKLORE
Santuario del Socavón
Faro de Conchupata
HT Viajeros del Tiempo
Migración
Casa de Cultura Simón I. Patiño
Mercado Campero
Train Station
Bus Terminal
See Inset
AYACUCHO
JUNIN
WASHINGTON
PDDTE. MONTES
LA PLATA
S. GALVARRO
A. MIER
BOLIVAR
SUCRE
Cathedral
Banco Unión
Police
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ACCOMMODATION	
Alojamiento San Salvador	I
Hotel Bernal	A
Hotel Gran Sucre	G
Hotel Hidalgo	F
Hotel Lipton	D
Hotel Monarca	E
Hotel Repostero	H
International Park Hotel	B
Residencial Bonaventure	C

RESTAURANTS, CAFÉS & BARS	
Bar Huari	6
Club Social Croata	1
Confiteria Center	2
Confiteria SUM	3
El Fogón	5
Govinda	7
El Hornito	4
Nayjama	8

Museo Antropológico Eduardo López Rivas & Museo de Mineralógia ▼

courtyard, are bright and warm, with comfortable beds and cable TV. Breakfast included. ④

International Park Hotel Rajka Bakovick Ⓣ02/5276277, Ⓔlparkhot@coteor.net.bo. Directly above the bus terminal in a modern, anodyne high-rise, and very convenient if you're just overnighting in Oruro. The comfortable rooms have heating and cable TV, and there's also a restaurant, bar and sauna. Breakfast included. ⑥

Residencial Bonaventure Av Brasil, opposite the bus terminal Ⓣ02/5279412. A basic place, with small but warm and clean rooms. ②

The City

There's relatively little in Oruro to remind you that this was once the industrial centre of Bolivia, a booming city with a sophisticated middle class and a sizeable international community. A few buildings that date from Oruro's heyday in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century are still in evidence around the centre, built from large stone blocks with arched doorways and wrought-iron balconies overhanging the street. Otherwise, though, the city is dominated by the unlovely, functional architecture you'd expect to find in a mining town at the wrong end of half a century of decline. Architecture aside, the **Museo Antropológico Eduardo López Rivas**, in the southern outskirts of the city, is one of Bolivia's better provincial museums, with a good archeological collection and a display of Carnaval masks and costumes. It's also definitely worth checking out the **Santuario del Socavón**, the focus of the Carnaval celebrations, which sits on top of an abandoned mineshaft now occupied by the unusual **Museo Etnográfico Minero**.

Around the Plaza 10 de Febrero

At the centre of the city is the **Plaza 10 de Febrero**, named for the date the people of Oruro joined the Great Rebellion of 1781. It's a pleasant enough square, shaded by cypress trees, with an over-elaborate fountain decorated with bronze animals in the centre and a statue of Aniceto Arce, the conservative president who oversaw the construction of the vital first railway link between Oruro and the coast in 1892. On and around the square are a few buildings which hint at the prosperity the city enjoyed in that era, most notably the **Palais Concert Theatre** on the southeast corner, with its lavish stucco facade, and the grandiose **post office** a block north on Avenida Montes.

A few blocks northwest of the plaza on Soria Galvarro, the **Casa de Cultura Simón I. Patiño** (Mon–Fri 8am–noon & 3–6pm; $2) is the city's best reminder of the great wealth that the mines of Oruro once produced, as well as of the unequal way in which it was distributed. Designed by French architects in the first years of the twentieth century, this elegant Neoclassical palace was built as a town house for the great tin baron Simón Patiño (see box, p.192), though by the time it was completed he no longer lived in Bolivia. Seized by the state after the 1952 revolution, the house is now administered by the city's university, but many of the rooms have been maintained in their original state. Set around a beautifully tiled, glass-roofed central patio are the astonishingly opulent living quarters of Patiño and his family, with chandeliers of Venetian crystal, Louis XV furniture from France, fine Persian carpets and lashings of marble and gold leaf. Certain features suggest that Patiño's taste never quite lived up to his wealth: witness the countless portraits of him and his wife, or the cigar-toting angels painted on the roof of the smoking room. Other interesting items include the massive mechanical organ made in Holland, and the steel safe which was blown open with dynamite by revolutionaries in 1952.

Three blocks further up Soria Galvarro, a left turn takes you up a steep hill to the **Faro de Conchupata**, a lighthouse monument built to commemorate the first raising of the current Bolivian national flag, which took place on this

The King of Tin: Simón Patiño

Few individuals played a greater role in shaping modern Bolivia than the tin baron **Simón Patiño**, who rose from humble mestizo origins to become one of the richest men in the world, popularly known as the Rockefeller of the Andes and the King of Tin. Born in 1860 to a poor family in a small town in the Cochabamba valley, Patiño moved to Oruro in 1894 to begin work as a clerk in a mining supply store. A year later he bought his first share in the La Salvadora mine, southeast of Oruro, and in 1897 bought out his partner to control what turned out to be one of the biggest deposits of high-grade tin in the world. Legend has it that at first he and his wife Albina dug out the precious ore with their own hands and carried it downhill in wheelbarrows and then across country by llama train. But in 1900 Patiño struck one of the richest veins of ore ever found in Bolivia, the mother lode that was to make his fortune. Many put his success down to a pact with the devil, and he certainly always participated in the ritual offerings made by miners to El Tío, the horned god of the underworld.

By 1905, La Salvadora was the most productive mine in the country, operated by foreign technicians using the most modern equipment. Patiño used the wealth it generated to buy up all the surrounding mines and to link them all by rail to the main railway line to the coast. By the early 1920s he controlled about half Bolivia's tin output, was the country's most important private banker, and enjoyed an income far greater than the government, which he effectively controlled. This wealth came at the expense of the many thousands of miners he employed, however, who suffered low pay and appalling conditions, as well as severe oppression at the hands of the military garrisons in the mining camps, which received extra pay from Patiño.

Not content with his Bolivian holdings alone, Patiño also expanded his commercial empire internationally, creating a powerful multinational corporation by buying up mining interests in Asia and Africa and foundries in Germany, the USA and Britain. This corporation controlled the entire production process for about a quarter of the world's tin and played an important role in setting international prices. Rumoured to have Nazi sympathies, he was said to have played a large part in financing General Franco's victory in the Spanish Civil War. Described by one contemporary as "seam-faced, short and swarthy with a long, twisting, tight mouth that opens seldom and says little when it does open", by the early 1920s his fortune was estimated at $100 million, making him one of the five richest men in the world. But for all his riches, Patiño never really overcame the prejudices of Bolivia's white elite, and from 1924 onwards lived permanently abroad after being snubbed by the Cochabamba aristocracy. In 1925 he moved his corporate base to the USA to avoid increased Bolivian taxes, but he spent most of his time in London, Paris and the French Riviera, where he became known as a bon viveur. He died in Buenos Aires in 1947, and thus never lived to see the nationalization of his Bolivian mine holdings, an event which no doubt had him turning in his grave.

site in 1851. The lighthouse serves no practical purpose but – municipal budget permitting – it still lights up every evening and sweeps the night sky. There are good views from the foot of the lighthouse over the urban sprawl of Oruro, across the Altiplano to Lago Uru Uru to the south and the Vinto ore-processing plant to the southeast. In the colonial era the rocky promontory on which the lighthouse stands marked the boundary between the Spanish city to the south and the clearly segregated indigenous miners' settlements to the north.

This part of town is where most of the Carnaval costumes and masks are made, in dozens of workshops concentrated along the length of **Avenida La Paz**, which runs northwards parallel to Soria Galvarro. Most of the workshops have shopfronts where the masks and costumes are on display, and if you're not in Oruro for Carnaval it's worth strolling along this street to have a look at their intricate and beautiful craftsmanship. The Carnaval celebrations are now so big that they support an entire industry which works year round to produce the ever more elaborate outfits worn by the dancers. Most of the artisans rightly take pride in their work and are usually happy to show you their wares even if you're not looking to buy anything. As well as being very expensive, most of the masks are too bulky and delicate to make good souvenirs, though some shops sell pocket-sized copies, which are affordable and easy to get home in one piece.

The Santuario del Socavón

Five blocks east of the Plaza 10 de Febrero at the foot of the Pie de Gallo Mountain stands the **Santuario del Socavón** (Sanctuary of the Mineshaft), home to the image of the Virgin del Socavón, the patron saint of miners, in whose honour the Carnaval celebrations are staged. The sanctuary was first built around 1781 to shelter the image, and was expanded and rebuilt in the 1990s. It's now a rather haphazard construction, with a modern brick and reinforced concrete shell, a stone belltower that survived from the nineteenth-century building, and an elegant sixteenth-century portico – the latter was rescued from the rubble of the Iglesia de la Compañía de Jesús more than ten years after it was demolished to make way for the modern cathedral on the Plaza 10 de Febrero. Inside, the high, arched ceiling is painted with bright frescoes of the Virgin del Socavón, flaming sword in hand, defending Oruro from the various supernatural menaces that have threatened it in the mythical past, including a giant serpent, an enormous frog and a dragon.

Painstakingly restored in the 1990s, the image of the **Virgin del Socavón** stands behind the altar, painted on an adobe wall. A simple picture of the Virgin Mary in a blue robe being crowned by two cherubs, the image is said to have appeared miraculously in the late eighteenth century inside the abandoned mineshaft upon which the church is built. This mineshaft was used as a hideout by **Chiru-Chiru**, a bandit with a reputation for stealing from the rich and giving to the poor. As he lay mortally wounded in the mine after a shoot-out with the authorities, Chiru-Chiru repented of his crimes before a vision of the Virgin; after his death, her image was discovered painted on the wall beside his body. Chiru-Chiru's deathbed scene is depicted in one of the stained-glass windows of the church; other windows feature images of miners and their families in the mining camps.

In front of the church is the **Plaza del Folklor**, a broad paved square where the climax of the Carnaval procession takes place. At the south end of the square stands a modern **statue** commemorating the revolutionary role played by the mineworkers in Bolivia's recent political history. It depicts four miners working in a mineshaft while a fifth strikes a classic revolutionary pose outside, rifle held triumphantly above his head and broken manacles dangling from his wrist; at the entrance to the shaft a bowler-hatted Aymara woman sits breaking rocks, a reminder of the important role played by the miners' wives in both the day-to-day battle to survive in the mining communities and in their wider political struggles.

The Museo Etnográfico Minero

The abandoned mineshaft beneath the church is now home to the **Museo Etnográfico Minero** (Mon–Sat 7.30am–noon & 3–6pm, Sun 7.30am–noon & 4–6pm; $0.50), which looks at the history of mining from the miners' perspective and is well worth a visit, not least because of its unusual underground location. After buying a ticket from the nuns in the *secretaria* next to the church, you enter the museum by going down the steps into the mine at the back of the church. On your way down, you'll see a lifesized statue of the outlaw hero Chiru-Chiru, who bled to death here in his underground hideout. At the bottom of the shaft the mine gallery stretching left and right is lined with a collection of **mining equipment** ranging from leather spoilbags from the colonial era to more modern helmets, electric headlamps and powerdrills, accompanied by photos of miners at work. Particularly interesting are the various pouches and slings used by the miners to conceal lumps of ore beneath their clothes so they could be smuggled out of the mine and sold behind the mineowner's back. At one end of the shaft stand two statues of **El Tío**, the devil-like figure worshipped by Bolivian miners as the king of the underworld and owner of all minerals. With fearsome horned masks and cigars clenched between their teeth, the two Tíos are draped in paper streamers and surrounded by offerings of coca, alcohol and tobacco brought by the miners to ensure their success and safety underground (for more on El Tío see p.219).

The Museo Antropológico Eduardo López Rivas

On Avenida España in the southern outskirts of the city, best reached by taxi or micro #7, #101 or #102 heading south from Plaza 10 de Febrero, the worthwhile **Museo Antropológico Eduardo López Rivas** (Mon–Fri 8am–noon & 3–6pm, Sat & Sun 10am–noon; $0.50; ☎02/5274020) is home to an extensive collection of archeological and ethnographic artefacts from the Oruro region, ranging from ancient stone axes and arrowheads to modern Carnaval masks and costumes. Sadly, though, most of the items on display are poorly explained, with little background information on the cultures that produced them.

Many of the archeological finds are from the **Aymara** or **Colla** kingdoms that dominated the Altiplano between the fall of Tiwanaku and the Inca conquest of the region in the fifteenth century. These include various objects taken from the many stone tombs, or *chullpas*, found throughout the Altiplano, among them some beautifully carved decorative stone puma and llama heads; bronze tools and weapons; fragments of finely woven textiles; and several shrivelled mummies and elongated skulls deliberately deformed through trepanning.

One section of the museum is dedicated to the **Chipayas**, or Urus, the ethnic group which was probably the first to inhabit the Altiplano, arriving from the Pacific coast in around 2500 BC – the Chipayas are now confined to a small territory in the desolate region around the Salar de Coipasa, west of Oruro. The display of everyday artefacts from contemporary Chipaya life gives some idea of how they manage to survive in this unforgiving environment, including examples of the distinctive woven costumes which most Chipayas still wear; a full-sized example of one of their circular huts, with doors made from cactus and roofs thatched with aquatic reeds; and examples of the nets and throwing bolas (a type of weighted lasso) they use to catch the fish and aquatic birds that form a major part of their diet.

A beautiful collection of **Carnaval masks** complements the archeological displays well, showing how the distinctive culture of the Andean peoples has survived almost five centuries of cultural oppression. Brightly painted and intricately made, with gleaming metal teeth and twisted horns decorated with mirrors and writhing with serpents and lizards, the splendidly grotesque Diablada masks are true works of art, and it's a pleasure to be able to examine them at such close range.

Museo de Mineralógia

A few kilometres north of the city – take any micro marked "Ciudad Universitaria" from outside the train station or hop in a taxi (about $1)

– the **Museo de Mineralógia** (Mon–Fri 9am–noon & 3–6pm; $1) has one of the biggest collections of minerals in South America, comprising about four thousand different pieces. The mineral collection is all there is, though, and unless you have a specialist knowledge of or interest in geology or mineralogy there's only so much you can get out of gazing at a load of rocks, though the bewildering variety of shapes and colours is impressive.

Eating, drinking and nightlife

Oruro has a fairly varied selection of **places to eat**, including several restaurants serving up the hearty local cuisine based on meat and potatoes, including delicious roast-lamb dishes like *mecheado* or *brazuelo*. Most places don't open until mid-morning, so for an early **breakfast** your best bet is to head for the Mercado Campero, where you'll find hot drinks, snacks, juices and filling soups throughout the day. There are plenty of cheap roast-chicken **restaurants and snack bars** on Calle 6 de Octubre, where late on Friday and Saturday night stalls serve the local speciality *rostro asado*, roasted sheep's head, from which the face is peeled off and served along with the eyeballs. Some say the reason it's served late at night is because you have to be drunk to eat it, and there's usually no shortage of takers among the drinkers who frequent the motley collection of rough-and-ready bars, clubs and karaokes in the city centre that are the mainstay of Oruro's low-key **nightlife**. The liveliest of these is *Brujas*, on Calle Junín and Avenida 6 de Agosto, where dancing and drinking continues into the night on the weekends.

Restaurants, cafés and bars

Bar Huari Junín and Galvarro. Once the most fashionable bar in Oruro, but now sadly run-down, though it preserves a certain dilapidated charm and is still a lively place for a beer and a bite to eat at weekends. Legend has it that Bolivia's national cocktail, the *chufflay* (a mixture of *singani* and 7-Up), was invented here by British mining engineers.

Club Social Croata Junín and Montes. The grandiose wood-panelled dining room on the first floor now houses a simple restaurant serving good-value set *almuerzos* and *cenas*. The name is about all that remains of Oruro's once thriving Croatian community.

Confitería Center Plaza 10 de Febrero and Meier. Mellow little bar-café attracting an older, arty and intellectual crowd with good coffee, juices and snacks, giving way to beers and spirits in the evening.

Confitería SUM Bolívar 615. Spacious student hang-out serving coffee, juices, snacks and ice cream, as well as a reasonable set *almuerzo* and more expensive meat and chicken main courses.

El Fogón San Felipe and Brasil. The best restaurant near the bus terminal, specializing in

Moving on from Oruro

Oruro is the main transport hub of the Altiplano. All buses heading south or west from La Paz pass through here, and it's also at the centre of what's left of Bolivia's once proud railway network. Almost all **long-distance buses** depart from the Terminal Terrestre. **Ticket** sales are upstairs, where there's also a small restaurant and a reasonably helpful **information office** (daily 8am–10pm; ☎052/79535). You board buses from the ground floor, where you have to pay the $0.30 fee for using the terminal. The only long-distance buses that don't use the terminal are those for Tarija, which depart from a stop on Avenida Ejército on the eastern outskirts of the city.

Trains heading south to Tupiza or Villazón on the Argentine border via Uyuni depart four times a week from the train station (☎052/74605) on Avenida Galvarro. See the box on p.196 for full details.

Train travel in the Altiplano

Bolivia's last surviving railway line, running between Oruro and Villazón via Uyuni and Tupiza, offers a faster and more comfortable alternative to travelling across the Altiplano by bus. There are two trains: the faster and more luxurious **Expreso del Sur** – with heated carriages, a fully functioning bar and dining car complete with waiters in bow ties – and the slower but less expensive **Wara Wara del Sur**; each has three different classes of carriage of varying cost and comfort ($2–20 depending on train, class of service, and distance travelled). The full timetable is given below, but schedules are liable to change. If possible, you should buy tickets in advance, but there's usually space for last-minute passengers. You can also buy tickets in La Paz from the office on the corner of Fernando Guachalla and Sanchez Lima.

Expreso del Sur

	Tue, Wed, Fri & Sat		Wed, Thurs, Sat & Sun
Oruro	3.30pm	Villazón	3.30pm
Uyuni	10.40pm	Tupiza	6.25pm
Tupiza	4.10am	Uyuni	12.05am
Villazón	7.00am	Oruro	7am

Wara Wara del Sur

	Sun, Mon, Wed & Thurs		Mon, Tues, Thurs & Fri
Oruro	7pm	Villazón	3.30pm
Uyuni	2.50am	Tupiza	7.05pm
Tupiza	9.05am	Uyuni	1.45am
Villazón	12.00pm	Oruro	9.00am

pork dishes like *lechón* and *chicharrón*, accompanied by *wa'tya* – potatoes cooked in a traditional earth oven.

Govinda 6 de Octubre and Bolívar. Peaceful vegetarian restaurant run by Hare Krishna devotees providing healthy, tasty and inexpensive alternatives to the meat-based Orureño cuisine, including muesli and yoghurt, samosas, pastas and a filling set *almuerzo*. Closed Sun.

El Hornito Galvarro with Bolívar. No-nonsense *salteñería* serving tasty meat and chicken *salteñas* from mid-morning to mid-afternoon. There's another branch on Junin with Montes as well as several foodcarts that roam the city centre serving up *salteñas*.

Nayjama Pagador and Aldana. By far the best restaurant in town, serving huge portions of deliciously cooked local food for $4–5 a plate. Specialities include sublime roast lamb, a substantial vegetarian plate, and a mixed-grill dish known as *El Intendente* after the visiting government official who devised it. The *criadillos* – prairie oysters – are not for the faint-hearted.

Listings

Banks and exchange The Banco de Crédito, at Montes and Bolívar, and Banco Union, at Mier and La Plata, both change cash and traveller's cheques and have ATMs.

Bus information ☎02/5279535.

Hospital Hospital General (☎02/5277408), 6 de Octubre and San Felipe.

Internet access Plenty of places in the city centre, especially on 6 de Octubre – try Café Internet, 6 de Octubre with Junín, or Full internet, 6 de Octubre and Mier (both 9am–10pm; $0.60 per hour).

Laundry Lavandería, Washington and Cochabamba.

Post office Half a block north of the Plaza 10 de Febrero on Av Montes.

Telephone office The ENTEL office is on Plaza Manuel Castro de Padilla, at Bolívar with Soria Galvarro.

Train information ☎052/74605.

Around Oruro

There are a couple of worthwhile half-day excursions **around Oruro**. To the northeast of the city, about 25km away on a turn-off from the road to Cochabamba, the **aguas termales** (thermal baths) at Obrajes (daily 7am–6pm; $1.50) are a good place to relax and soak away the chill of the Altiplano. The recently remodelled baths are fed by natural hot springs with reputedly curative powers, and there are also more expensive private baths for rent, as well as a place to buy drinks and snacks. Micros heading to Obrajes leave every half-hour or so from the corner of Avenida 6 de Agosto and Caro.

About 12km southeast of the city begin the marshy margins of **Lago Uru Uru** (say it quickly and you'll see where Oruro got its name), a shallow, brackish lake fed by the Río Desaguadero, which drains the overflow from Lago Titicaca to the north. When water levels are high during the rainy season (between January and March, or later if it has been a wet year) you may see hundreds of flamingos in the shallow waters of the lake, as well as many ducks and other wading birds. The fringes of Lago Uru Uru have long been home to small communities of **Urus**, the oldest ethnic group of the Altiplano. The Urus traditionally scrape a marginal existence by fishing and hunting waterfowl, as well as by herding llamas and cultivating *quinua* and other crops, though the salination of the land around the lake as the water level has fallen, together with mining pollution, pressure from Aymara farmers and the lure of the city, has seen population levels decline over the last few decades.

A rough road heads southwest to the **Chilean border** at Pisiga, 228km from Oruro, cutting across the northern fringes of the lake along a raised causeway, the **Puente Español**, built in the colonial era to allow the year-round passage of mule trains taking silver down to the coast and returning with mercury for processing the metal. Despite a recent crackdown, this route is popular with smugglers bringing cars and other goods from Chile, and there's a police checkpoint at the start of the causeway, about thirty minutes' drive from Oruro. From the checkpoint, a thirty-minute walk around the lakeshore to the northwest takes you to **CHUSAQUERI**, an all but abandoned farming hamlet overlooked

The Chipayas

About 180km southwest of Oruro across the Altiplano, the remote village of Chipaya is home to the **Chipayas**, an ethnic group that is culturally and linguistically distinct from both the Aymara and Quechua. Now confined to a small territory in this desolate region, the Chipayas are thought to be descended from the **Urus**, an ancient people who are considered to be the oldest inhabitants of the Altiplano, having arrived from the Pacific coast in around 2500 BC. Driven into the unforgiving environment of this remote corner of the Altiplano over several centuries under population pressure from the Aymara, the Chipayas eke out a marginal living by growing *quinua* in the saline soils and by catching fish and aquatic birds, though even this has become more difficult in recent years because of mining pollution. Despite the desperate poverty and external pressures they face, the Chipayas have maintained their unique language, culture and religious beliefs, which are a source of continuing fascination to anthropologists, and though modern concrete buildings are beginning to make their presence felt, many of the buildings in the village are still the distinctive circular huts with doors made from cactus and roofs thatched with aquatic reeds. Given the difficulty of getting here and the lack of accommodation, if you're interested in observing something of the Chipayas's daily life, it's best to do it in a 4WD – the Oruro tour agency HT Viajeros del Tiempo can organize this, and has guides who know the region.

by about a dozen pre-Columbian tombs known as **chullpas**, in varying states of repair. These carefully built adobe structures are around 2m high and sit on solid stone platforms, their roofs tiled with flat stones and with narrow doorways looking out across the lake to the west. It's thought they were built by the Wankarani culture, which dominated this region in the period preceding the arrival of the Incas. Some of the artefacts found here are on display in the Museo Antropológico Eduardo López Rivas in Oruro (see p.194).

South from Oruro a road and railway line run 118km across the Altiplano to the small town of **CHALLAPATA**, an important market centre for the Aymara and Quechua *ayllus* who inhabit the rugged mountain chain to the east. On the way south you pass the shallow and brackish waters of **Lago Poopó**, the final destination for the overflow water which is drained from Lago Titicaca by the Río Desaguadero. You can see the lake shimmering in the distance from the road and can sometimes spot flamingos and other waterfowl, though mining pollution has greatly reduced the number of birds that once flocked there. At Challapata, the road forks: one branch continues (together with the railway) due south across the ever more arid and inhospitable Altiplano to Uyuni (see p.221), just over 200km away. The other branch climbs into the sparsely populated mountains to the southeast, passing through a series of high plains where hundreds of llamas graze, then dropping into a deep but relatively fertile valley before climbing again to reach the city of Potosí (see below), 201km from Challapata.

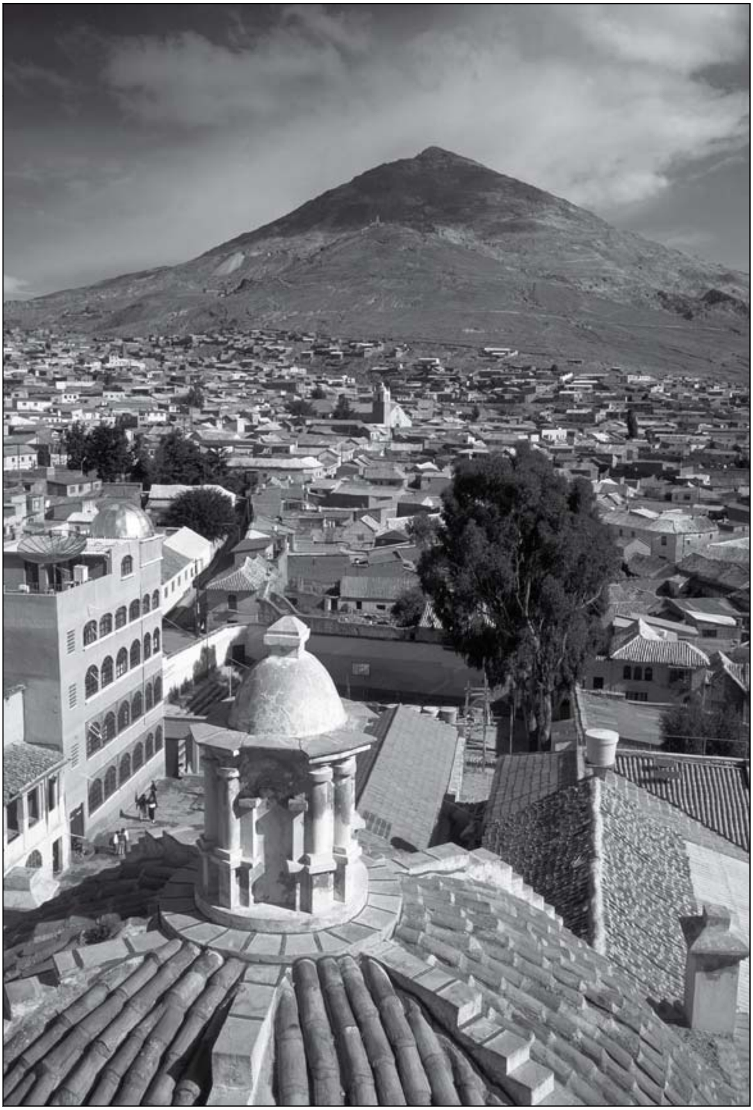
Potosí and around

I am rich Potosí, treasure of the world, king of the mountains, envy of kings.

Legend on the coat of arms of Potosí

Set on a desolate, windswept plain amid barren mountains at almost 4100m above sea level, **POTOSÍ** is the highest city in the world, and at once the most fascinating and tragic place in Bolivia. Given its remote and inhospitable location, at first glance it's difficult to see why it was ever built here at all. The answer lies in **Cerro Rico** ("Rich Mountain"), the conical peak that rises imperiously above the city to the south. Cerro Rico was, quite simply, the richest source of silver the world had ever seen – one seventeenth-century chronicler described it as a "singular work of the power of God, unique miracle of nature, perfect and permanent wonder of the world, happiness of mortals, emperor of summits, king of the mountains, prince of all the minerals". The silver extracted from this mountain turned Potosí into the richest jewel in the Spanish emperors' crown, and one of the wealthiest and largest cities in the world – in the early seventeenth century it was home to about 160,000 people, far bigger than contemporary Madrid, and equal in size to London. In its heyday the city was so famous for its riches that the expression "*eso vale un Potosí*" ("this is worth a Potosí") was used in colloquial Spanish to describe anything priceless. However, this wealth was achieved at the expense of the millions of indigenous Andean forced labourers and African slaves who died working in the mines and silver foundries. Though it was said that you could build a bridge stretching from Potosí to Spain with the silver of Cerro Rico, others have pointed out that two such bridges could have been built with the bones of those who died mining it.

Today, Potosí's legacy reflects both the magnificence and the horror of its colonial past. The city is a treasure trove of **colonial art and architecture**, with hundreds of well-preserved buildings, including some of the finest



▲ View of Cerro Rico from Potosí

churches in Bolivia. But its tragic history weighs heavily on the shoulders of the living and is evident both in the sense of sadness that seems to haunt its narrow streets and in the appalling conditions still endured by those who work the mines of Cerro Rico, for though the silver veins were almost all exhausted centuries ago, the labyrinthine tunnels that perforate the scarred mountain are still worked for tin and other metals by thousands of indigenous miners using techniques little changed from a century or more ago. A visit to these mines has

Fiestas in Potosí

Potosí is known within Bolivia as the *ciudad de los costumbres* (the city of customs) because of the great importance its inhabitants attach to traditional religious rituals and celebrations. The city's fiestas combine the veneration of Catholic saints with ceremonies associated with traditional Andean beliefs, and are usually marked by processions, folkloric dances and copious eating and drinking.

The Circumcision of Christ (Jan 1). Procession and folkloric dances in the San Benito neighbourhood.

Día de los Compadres (Feb, two weeks before Carnaval). The miners carry the crosses which stand at the entrances to the mines, known as *Tata Ckacchas*, down from Cerro Rico in a procession accompanied by brass bands, costumed dancers and dynamite explosions.

Carnaval (February/March). Carnaval is celebrated with waterfights and costumed dances, and is also the occasion for *ch'allas* – the blessing of cars, buildings and other property with ritual libations of alcohol, coloured streamers and llama or sheep blood.

San Juan de Dios (March 8). Procession of the image of San Juan de Dios which is kept in San Lorenzo de Carangas, accompanied by folkloric dances.

Semana Santa (April). Easter is marked by a series of Masses and processions of different saints and celebrated with the preparation of a special meal, available on steets and made up of seven different meat-free meals.

Pentecostés (May or June). Llama sacrifices – accompanied by eating, drinking, coca-chewing, music and dance – are performed in all the mines on the seventh Sunday after Easter in honour of *Pachamama*, the earth goddess, to ensure safety and success in finding minerals.

San Bartolomé or **Ch'utillos** (Aug 24–26). Potosí's biggest annual fiesta, centred on the re-enactment of an ancient legend by unmarried young men (known as *Ch'utillos*) mounted on horseback and dressed in their finest traditional costumes. Accompanied by dancers and musicians, the *Ch'utillos* ride to and from the Cueva del Diablo (Devil's Cave) near the village of La Puerta, where according to legend an evil spirit was exorcized by Jesuit priests using a statue of San Bartolomé.

Señor de la Vera Cruz (Sept 14). Religious procession in honour of Potosí's miraculous patron saint, whose statue is housed in San Francisco.

become as essential a part of a visit to Potosí as any of its museums or churches, and is fascinating for the insight it affords into both the working lives of the miners and the customs and beliefs that help them survive. Perhaps as a consequence of its woeful past, Potosí and the surrounding rural hinterland are famous within Bolivia for their carefully preserved traditional customs and folkloric **fiestas**.

Some history

The discovery of the silver mountain is shrouded in myth. Legend has it that the **Incas** were on the point of mining here in 1462 when a thunderous supernatural voice warned them off, saying the gods were saving the silver for others who would come from afar. When the Inca Huayna Capac was told of this, he declared the mountain sacrosanct and named it *Ppotojsi*, a Quechua word meaning "thunder" or "burst". The silver was apparently rediscovered in 1545 by a llama herder named **Diego Huallpa**. Caught out after dark whilst pursuing stray llamas on the slopes of Cerro Rico, Huallpa started a fire to keep warm, and was amazed to see a trickle of molten silver run out from the blaze. News of this discovery soon reached the ears of the Spaniards, and a silver rush was quickly under way. Within a year and a half the disorderly new mining camp that had sprung up – grandiosely named the Villa Imperial de Carlos V de Potosí – was home to over 14,000 people. Over the next twenty years Potosí became the richest single source of silver in the world, and its population mushroomed to over 100,000, making it easily the biggest city in the Americas.

This growth was based on the extraction of surface deposits with high ore contents, which were easily processed by the indigenous miners using primitive smelting techniques. As these surface deposits ran out and shaft mining developed, the purity of the ore declined and production costs rose; in addition, labour became increasingly scarce, as workers became aware of the appalling conditions in the mines. This crisis was overcome by the energetic **Viceroy Francisco de Toledo**, who arrived in Potosí in 1572 determined to modernize the silver industry and revive a vital source of imperial revenue. Toledo persuaded the leading mine owners to invest in the construction of a massive system of dams, artificial lakes and aqueducts in the mountains above the city to provide a constant supply of water to power the water wheels that crushed the ore for processing. Toledo also introduced the newly discovered amalgam process for refining silver using mercury; established the first royal mint, where all silver mined in Potosí had to be turned into coins or ingots; and introduced a basic mining code to regulate property rights, reducing violent disputes between mine owners. Most importantly, Toledo tackled the acute labour shortage in the mines by adapting the Inca system of labour service known as the *mita*. Under this regime, an area stretching from Cuzco to northern Argentina was divided into sixteen districts, each of which was obliged to send one-seventh of its male population to the mines each year. This provided an annual workforce of about 13,500 men – known as *mitayos* – at almost no cost to the mine owners. The *mitayos* were housed in fourteen *parroquias de Indios* (Indian parishes), clearly separated from the Spanish city centre, whose chaotic street layout Toledo ordered redrawn to conform to royal ordinances governing town planning.

These reforms greatly boosted silver production, and Potosí entered a boom that lasted almost a century and generated fabulous riches. By the beginning of the seventeenth century Potosí was home to more than 160,000 people and boasted dozens of magnificent churches, as well as theatres, gambling-houses, brothels and dancehalls – for the Corpus Christi celebrations of 1658 the streets of the city were literally paved with silver bars. The silver also had a global impact, funding the wars of Spain, fuelling long-term inflation and economic growth in Europe, and financing emerging trade relations between Europe and Asia.

For the **indigenous workers and African slaves** who produced this wealth, however, the consequences were catastrophic. Conditions inside the mines were truly appalling. Staying deep underground for up to a week at a time and forced to meet ever more outrageous quotas, the *mitayos* and other labourers died at a terrible rate; outside, the highly toxic mercury used in processing the silver posed an equal threat to those working in the *ingenios*, the large foundries in which the ore was processed. In 1626, four thousand people were killed when the restraining dyke of an artificial lake collapsed and flood waters swept away entire blocks of the city. Even contemporary observers were shocked by the horrors of Potosí: one sixteenth-century writer described the mines as a ravening beast that swallowed men alive. In all, it's thought that seven of every ten men who went to Potosí to work under the *mita* never returned. Estimates of the total number who died over three centuries of colonial mining in Potosí run as high as nine million, making the mines of Potosí a central factor in the demographic collapse that swept the Andes under Spanish rule.

Like all such booms, the silver bonanza at Potosí eventually cooled. From about 1650 silver production entered a century-long decline that saw the population of Potosí dwindle to just 30,000, as people abandoned the city to seek economic opportunity elsewhere. The Spanish monarchy helped recovery by reducing the tax rate on silver production to ten percent, creating a mineral-purchasing bank, establishing an academy of metallurgy and building a new royal mint, but Potosí never recovered its economic predominance. It remained a rich enough prize to be hotly disputed during the **Independence War**, however, changing hands frequently between royalist and Argentine armies, both of whom looted the city. By the time independence was won in 1825, Potosí's population was just nine thousand.

Silver mining recovered somewhat in the following decades, but from the end of the nineteenth century Potosí came to rely more and more on the mining of **tin** – another metal found in abundance in Cerro Rico, but previously ignored. Even this was just a temporary reprieve, however. Government efforts to support the industry culminated in the construction of the modern tin-smelting plant at Karachipampa, on the road to Sucre, a white elephant of epic proportions that was completed shortly before the price of tin collapsed in 1985 and therefore never operated. The state-owned mines closed down or were privatized, despite the best efforts of the powerful miners', union. Though co-operative miners continue to scrape a living by working the tired old veins of Cerro Rico for tin and other metals, Potosí never recovered from the decline of silver production, much less the tin crash. Today the city's many fine churches are all that remains of the immense wealth that once flowed from its mines.

Arrival and information

All **buses** (except those from Uyuni) arrive at the Terminal de Buses on Avenida Universitario, on the way out of town towards Oruro. Buses from Uyuni pull in at the various bus company offices on the corner of Avenida Universitario and Sevilla, two blocks up from the terminal. The Terminal de Buses has a restaurant, phone boxes, post office, luggage storage and a small **bus information office** (daily 7am–noon & 2–8pm; ☎02/6227354). From the terminal, a **taxi** into the city centre costs $0.50 per person (the basic rate for journeys throughout the city), or you can catch **micro** "A" heading up Avenida Universitario, which will take you to Plaza 10 de Noviembre, the central square. On foot, it's a steep twenty- to thirty-minute walk up to the city centre – not much fun at this altitude. If you're arriving from the valleys of Sucre or Tarija it's a good idea to take things easy for the first day or so while you get used to the higher altitude.

The best place for information is the **Oficina de Turismo Municipal** (Mon–Fri 8am–noon & 2–6pm; ☎02/6227404) in the striking modern mirrored building through the arch of Torre de la Compañía on Calle Ayacucho, a block west of Plaza 10 de Noviembre. The somewhat helpful staff do their best to answer enquiries (though in Spanish only) and can give advice on visiting the co-operative mines and other attractions outside the city; they also have various maps and books about Potosí in both English and Spanish for sale. It's also worth reporting any problems you might have with tour agencies or hotels here. Exhibitions of weavings and other handicrafts are sometimes held on the ground floor, and you have to pass through the building to climb to the top of the church tower (see p.209). There's a second tourist office in the **Caseta de Información** (Mon–Fri 8am–noon & 2–6pm), at the west end of Plaza 6 de Agosto, where you can get much the same information, but the opening hours are less reliable.

Accommodation

With night-time temperatures often falling below zero, the main consideration when choosing where to stay in Potosí is warmth. A couple of the more upmarket places have central heating, but otherwise try to find a room that gets some sun during the day, and don't hesitate to ask for extra blankets if you need them. There's a fairly good range of budget places, but only a limited selection of mid-range hotels – if you want to stay in one of these, it's not a bad idea to book in advance, especially between June and August.

Hostal Carlos V Linares 42 ☎02/6225121. Charming converted colonial house with simple but clean rooms looking out onto a glass-roofed central patio. Breakfast available. ②

Hostal La Casona Chuquisaca 460 ☎02/6230523. Beautifully restored colonial mansion with large rooms, laundry service, Internet and book exchange. Breakfast is included. ③

Hostal Colonial Hoyos 8 ☎02/6224265 or 6224809, ⓦwww.hostalcolonialpotosi.com. Beautifully restored colonial mansion with a centrally heated modern interior and comfortable, well-furnished rooms set around two peaceful tiled courtyards with fountains. Breakfast included. ⑥

Hostal Compañía de Jesœs Chuquisaca 445 ☎02/6223173. Delightful converted colonial building in the centre of town with clean, cosy rooms, good hot showers and a welcoming family atmosphere. Simple breakfast included. ③

Hostal Hacienda Caraya Caraya ☎02/6226380. Set in lush farmland in a warm valley 20km outside town and 500m lower, this wonderfully restored and opulently furnished colonial hacienda is the ideal place to stay if you find the altitude of Potosí too punishing. Transport to the city by taxi can be organized (about $8) and meals are available on request. Guests also have full use of a living room with a wood fire and an extensive library. Reserve through the hotel office on Av Camacho. Breakfast included. ⑥

Hotel Central Bustillos 1230 ☎02/6222207. This crumbling colonial mansion is in a good central location and has basic rooms with shared bathrooms and limited hot water. Breakfast available. ②

Hotel El Turista Lanza 19 ☎02/6222492. Welcoming and comfortable, if a bit worn out, with warm wooden floors and a bright, spacious glass-roofed lobby. For excellent views of Cerro Rico, ask for room 33, 34 or 35 at the top of the building. Breakfast available. ④

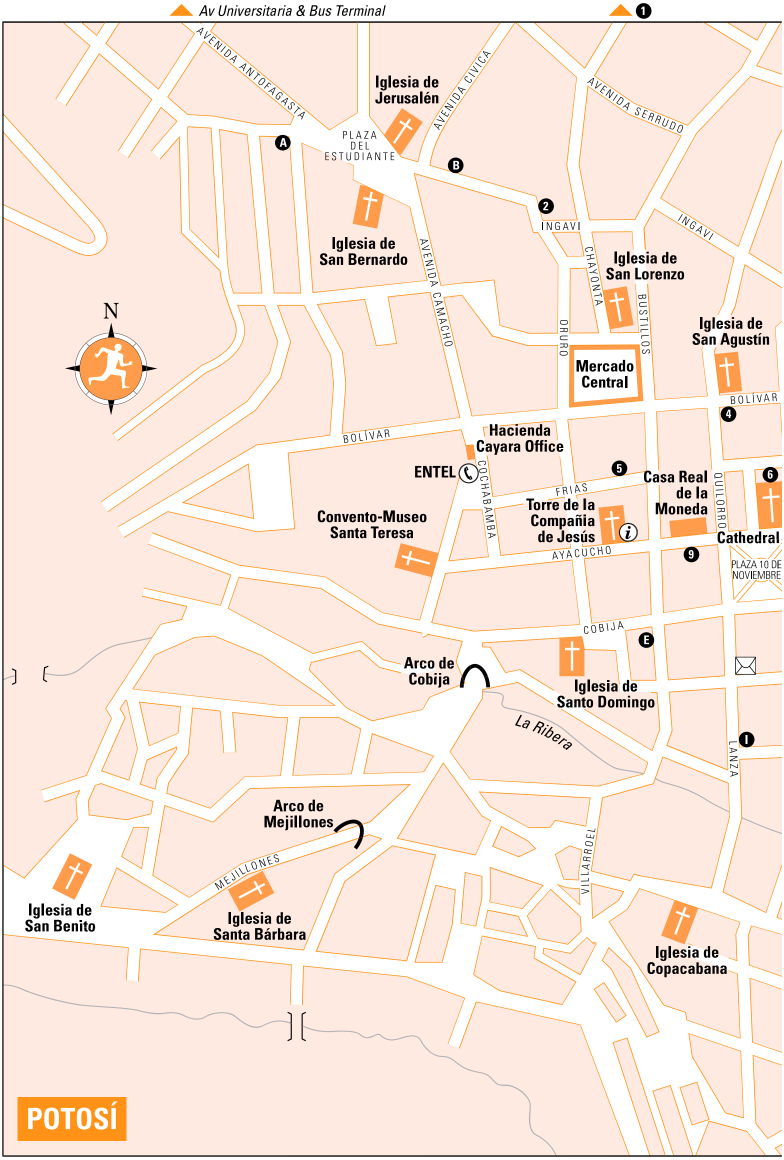
Hotel Jerusalém Oruro 143 ☎02/6224633 or 6226095, ⓦwww.hoteljerusalem.net. Unappealing exterior conceals a warm and peaceful interior with modern, well-decorated rooms opening onto a bright, communal balcony adorned with plants. Staff are helpful, there's abundant hot water and a good buffet breakfast is included. ⑤

Hotel Libertador Millares 58 ☎02/6227887 or 6223470, ⓔhostalib@cedro.pts.entelnet.bo. Classy and efficient modern hotel with central heating and bright, tastefully decorated rooms. Apart from the sun terrace with good views of Cerro Rico, though, it could be anywhere in the world. Breakfast available. ⑤

Residencial Sumaj F. Gumiel 12, just off Plaza Simón Bolívar ☎02/6223336. A steep walk down from the city centre towards the bus terminal, this backpackers' dive offers boxy and windowless rooms with shared bath (and limited hot water) around a large central patio. Breakfast available. ②

The City

Declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1987, Potosí is a living museum of Spanish colonial architecture. There are over two thousand registered colonial buildings still standing in the city, many of which have been recently restored with financial help from Spain. Hundreds of town houses and mine owners' mansions remain, complete with red-tiled roofs and decorative cast-iron or closed wooden balconies overhanging the narrow streets. Some have decorative carved stone porticos and their walls are painted in delicious pastel colours – pale blue, lemon yellow – or the rich ochre colour made with natural pigments from the red earth of Cerro Rico. Even more striking are the city's 25 or so **churches**, many of which date back to the colonial era and provide one of the few lasting memorials to the great wealth that once passed through Potosí. The most exuberant of these is **San Lorenzo de Carangas**,


Av Universitaria & Bus Terminal
❶
N
AVENIDA ANTOFAGASTA
Iglesia de Jerusalén
AVENIDA CIVICA
AVENIDA SERRUDO
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PLAZA DEL ESTUDIANTE
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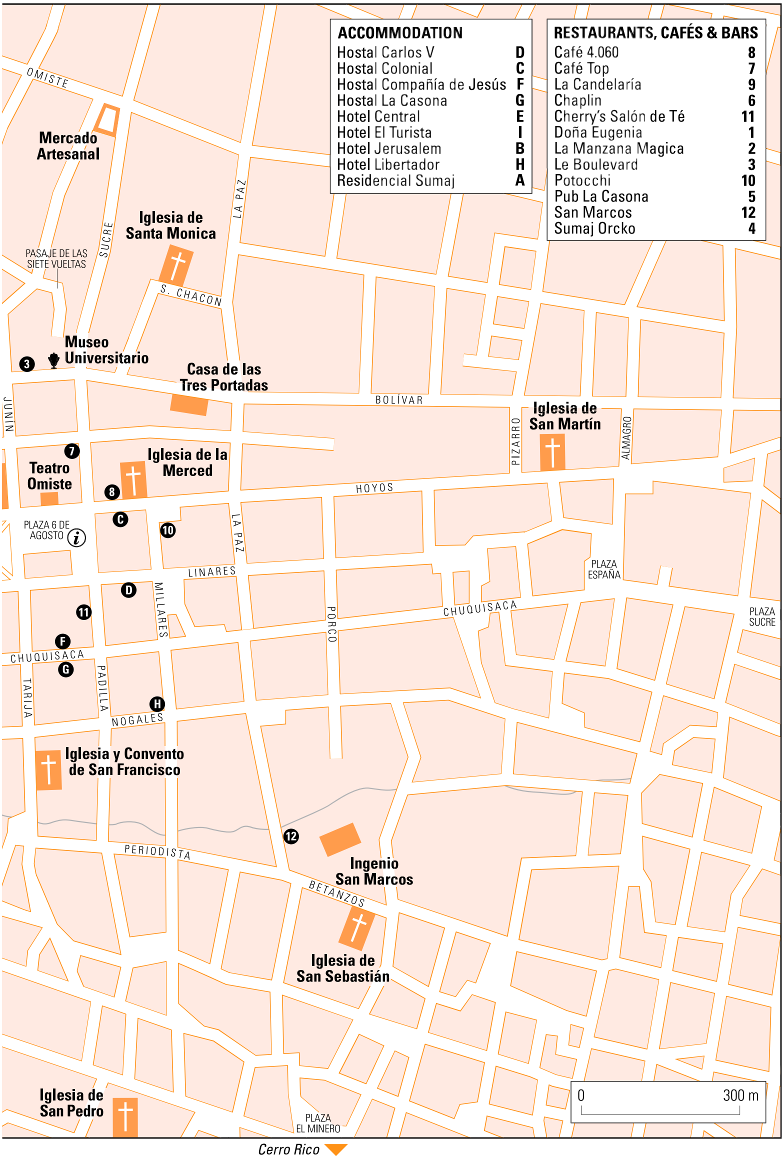
INGAVI
INGAVI
Iglesia de San Bernardo
AVENIDA CAMACHO
CHAYONTA
Iglesia de San Lorenzo
BUSTILLOS
ORURO
Iglesia de San Agustín
Mercado Central
BOLÍVAR
BOLÍVAR
❹
Hacienda Cayara Office
ENTEL
COCHABAMBA
❺
FRIAS
Casa Real de la Moneda
QUIJARRO
❻
Convento-Museo Santa Teresa
Torre de la Compañia de Jesús
Cathedral
AYACUCHO
❾
PLAZA 10 DE NOVIEMBRE
COBIJA
Ⓔ
Arco de Cobija
Iglesia de Santo Domingo
La Ribera
LANZA
Arco de Mejillones
MEJILLONES
VILLARROEL
Iglesia de San Benito
Iglesia de Santa Bárbara
Iglesia de Copacabana
POTOSÍ

whose elaborately carved doorway is a perfect example of the mestizo-Baroque architectural style in which European and Andean religious symbolism and artistic sensibilities are fused. The city's most outstanding monument, however, is the **Casa Real de la Moneda**, the colonial royal mint, home to Bolivia's finest museum, whose varied collection includes some of the best colonial religious art in the country.


ACCOMMODATION
Hostal Carlos V D
Hostal Colonial C
Hostal Compañía de Jesús F
Hostal La Casona G
Hotel Central E
Hotel El Turista I
Hotel Jerusalem B
Hotel Libertador H
Residencial Sumaj A
RESTAURANTS, CAFÉS & BARS
Café 4.060 8
Café Top 7
La Candelaría 9
Chaplin 6
Cherry's Salón de Té 11
Doña Eugenia 1
La Manzana Magica 2
Le Boulevard 3
Potocchi 10
Pub La Casona 5
San Marcos 12
Sumaj Orcko 4
OMISTE
Mercado Artesanal
SUCRE
LA PAZ
Iglesia de Santa Monica
PASAJE DE LAS SIETE VUELTAS
S. CHACON
Museo Universitario
Casa de las Tres Portadas
JUNIN
BOLÍVAR
Iglesia de San Martín
PIZARRO
ALMAGRO
Teatro Omiste
Iglesia de la Merced
HOYOS
PLAZA 6 DE AGOSTO
LINARES
MILLARES
PORCO
PLAZA ESPAÑA
CHUQUISACA
PLAZA SUCRE
TARIJA
PADILLA
NOGALES
Iglesia y Convento de San Francisco
PERIODISTA
Ingenio San Marcos
BETANZOS
Iglesia de San Sebastián
Iglesia de San Pedro
PLAZA EL MINERO
0 300 m
Cerro Rico

Plaza 10 de Noviembre

The centre of the city is the **Plaza 10 de Noviembre**, a pleasant square shaded by trees, with a broken fountain and a small copy of the Statue of Liberty, erected in 1926 to commemorate Bolivian independence. The heart of Spanish colonial power in Potosí, the square was formerly surrounded by the city's principal church, the *cabildo* (town hall) and the first royal mint, which stood here from 1572 to 1767,

Organized tours

There are a growing number of **tour operators** in Potosí, all of which offer half-day trips to the mines of **Cerro Rico** (see p.198). These are fairly standard and are supposed to cost a fixed $10 per person. Make sure your guide is licensed and that the company provides you with a helmet, jacket or overalls, boots and a headlamp, as well as transport to and from the mines; an English-speaking guide can be arranged at no extra cost. Most companies also run half- or one-day **city tours**, and some also organize hiking trips in the **Cordillera Kari-Kari** and excursions to other attractions outside Potosí. You can also organize tours of the **Salar de Uyuni** from here, though this costs more than if you arrange the trip in Uyuni itself.

Hidalgo Tours Bolívar with Junín ⓣ02/6225186, ⓕ02/6222707, ⓦwww.salar-uyuni.com. Upmarket operator offering the usual mine tours as well as guided tours of the city and expensive but relatively luxurious trips to the Salar de Uyuni.

Koala Tours Ayacucho 5 ⓣ02/6222092, ⓔktourspotosi@hotmail.com. Experienced and reliable operators with good English-speaking mine guides and a small mining museum inside a mine reserved exclusively for their groups. They also run hiking trips around the Kari Kari lakes (see p.220) with accommodation in mountain huts (2–3 days; $20 per person per day), and special trips to the Tinku in Macha (see p.220) in the first week of May, as well as other special events in the region. Mountain-bike excursions and rental are also planned.

Sumaj Tours Oruro 143, inside the *Hotel Jerusalén* ⓣ02/6224633 or 622495 ⓕ02/6222600, ⓔhoteljer@entelnet.bo. Friendly and well-organized company running tours of the mines with good English-speaking guides, as well as city tours and excursions.

though sadly none of these has survived. On the north side of the square, the site of the original church (which collapsed in 1807) is now occupied by the twin-towered **Cathedral**, completed in Neoclassical style in 1836. It's open most mornings and afternoons, and the bright, well-lit interior with a high ceiling supported by gilded pillars is worth a look, not least for the striking wooden images of Christ carved in the sixteenth century by the renowned sculptor Gaspar de la Cueva, who was responsible for many of the city's other religious statues. The site of the *cabildo* is now occupied by the departmental **Prefectura**, a nineteenth-century administrative building whose simple carved stone portico is all that remains of the colonial town hall; the site of the first Casa Real de la Moneda is occupied by the late nineteenth-century **Palacio de Justicia**.

To the east, the plaza adjoins another open space, the **Plaza 6 de Agosto**, at the centre of which is a column commemorating the Battle of Ayacucho, which secured Bolivian independence in 1824. From the north side it's overlooked by the **Teatro Omiste**, a former church, hospital and convent completed in 1753, with a recessed mestizo-Baroque facade under its one central arch. During the Independence War the church was used as a headquarters and bastion by royalist forces, who demolished its twin towers to make room for rooftop artillery emplacements (another church which stood in the plaza was completely demolished to clear a field of fire). It was converted into a theatre in 1850. Along the east side of the plaza runs **El Boulevard**, the bustling pedestrianized street which is the favourite meeting point for Potosinos young and old.

Casa Real de la Moneda

Half a block west of the Plaza 10 de Noviembre on Calle Ayacucho stands the unmissable **Casa Real de la Moneda**, or Royal Mint (Tues–Fri 9.30am–noon

& 2–6.30pm, Sat & Sun 9am–1pm; visits by guided tour only; $3), one of the most outstanding examples of colonial civil architecture in all South America and now home to the best museum in Bolivia. The vast and eclectic collection includes the original machinery used in the various stages of the minting process; some of Bolivia's finest colonial religious art; militaria; archeological artefacts; and a vast collection of coins and banknotes. Visits are by **guided tour** only: these are included in the entrance price and conducted in Spanish, English or French depending on demand. There are only two tours daily, usually beginning each morning and afternoon shortly after opening, so it's worth turning up on time; tours last about two hours. Be warned that even when the sun is shining outside it's very cold inside the complex, so bring something warm to wear.

Built over three decades between 1759 and 1773 to replace the earlier royal mint, La Moneda is a truly formidable construction, built as part of a concerted effort by the Spanish crown to reform the economic and financial machinery of the empire in order to increase its revenues. Along with Lima and Mexico City, Potosí was one of only three cities in Spanish America authorized to produce coins. The construction costs were so high – over a million pesos de oro – that emperor Carlos III is said to have asked if the new mint had been built entirely of silver. Occupying an entire city block – over 7,500 square metres – La Moneda is enclosed by stout stone walls over 1m thick with only a few barred windows looking out onto the street, giving it the appearance of a fortress. Inside is a rambling two-storey complex of about two hundred rooms set around five internal courtyards, all finely built with cut stone blocks and neat brickwork, with soaring roofs supported by massive hardwood beams. As well as housing all the heavy machinery and equipment needed to produce coins – much of which is well preserved and on display – La Moneda also housed

▲ El Mascarón at the Casa Real de la Moneda troops, workers, African slaves and the senior royal officials responsible for overseeing operations and ensuring the Spanish crown received its ten-percent cut of all silver produced in the mines of Cerro Rico. A vital nerve centre of Spanish imperial power in the Andes, it also served as a prison, treasury and near-impregnable stronghold in times of disorder.

The main **entrance** on Calle Ayacucho is an ornate Baroque portal with mighty double doors 4m high. The coat of arms above the door, bearing the lion and castle of the Spanish kingdoms of Castille and Léon, and the door knockers in the form of the double-headed eagle of the Habsburg dynasty leave little doubt as to whom this building belonged. From the doorway, a corridor leads through into the first interior patio, built in classic Spanish style with twelve stone arches supporting a second floor with a covered balcony running around the top and with a stone fountain in the centre. Overlooking the courtyard from above one of the arches is a large plaster mask of a smiling face crowned by a garland of leaves and grapes. Known as **El Mascarón**, this leering caricature has become one of the best-known symbols of Potosí, even though neither its origin nor meaning is clear. The most likely story is that it was made by Eugenio Mulón, a Frenchman working in the mint in the mid-nineteenth century – it's variously thought to represent Bacchus, the Roman god of plenty; Diego Huallpa, the llama-herder who discovered the silver of Cerro Rico; a parody of either President Belzu or of the director of the mint; or a veiled caricature of avarice. It has also been suggested that the mysterious mask was created during the Independence War to cover a royal coat of arms in mockery of Spanish rule.

Colonial religious art

The guided tour of the museum begins in a room full of **colonial paintings**, including a series depicting eighteenth-century battles between Spain and the Turks – one of the many wars funded by the silver of Potosí. There's also a good portrait of the Spanish emperor, Carlos III, on horseback, and portraits of several leading Potosí mine owners from the same period. The next room is exclusively dedicated to colonial paintings of the Virgin Mary, many of them painted by unnamed indigenous artists in the highly distinctive mestizo-Baroque style. Of these, the most outstanding is the **Virgen del Cerro**, one of the most important paintings ever produced in Bolivia and a supreme expression of Andean religious syncretism. Painted sometime in the eighteenth century by an anonymous but presumably indigenous artist, it depicts the Virgin Mary in the form of the Cerro Rico, fusing the Catholic Mother of God with Pachamama, the bountiful Andean earth goddess. From the heavens above the Virgin-Mountain, the Christian trinity of Father, Son and Holy Ghost (depicted as a white dove) reach down from amidst an escort of archangels and cherubim to place a crown on her head. On the earth below, the coronation is witnessed by the earthly spiritual hierarchy of pope, archbishop and priest (bottom left), and the temporal hierarchy of emperor, town councillor and knight of Santiago (bottom right). In the sky to the left and right of the Virgin, the sun and the moon, central figures in Inca religion, look on from the distance like exiled deities. The slopes of the mountain itself are richly detailed. Diego Huallpa sits by the fire that first revealed the existence of silver; miners work in search of the precious metal; a lordly Spaniard arrives, preceded by a priest on horseback; llamas graze on the lower slopes; and at the foot of the mountain stands the Inca Huayna Capac, no doubt issuing his legendary prohibition on extracting the silver, his presence a subtle reminder, perhaps, of the people to whom these lands once belonged.

The next room is filled entirely with paintings by **Melchor Pérez de Holguín**, the Cochabamba-born artist who was perhaps the finest exponent of the Andean Baroque style. Known as *La Brocha de Oro* – the Golden Brush – Holguín was the outstanding painter of the Potosí School and produced works at an extraordinary rate. His religious paintings found their way into all the major churches and convents of the city as well as further afield, and his style was widely imitated. The paintings on display here form the single biggest collection of his work anywhere, and range from his earliest efforts to the series of portraits of the Evangelists he produced shortly before his death in about 1730. Holguín's distinctive style is most evident in these delicate portraits: the more mystical Evangelists are portrayed with soft faces and bright, shining eyes; aesthetes are depicted with hard, drawn faces beneath which muscles and veins are visible as in an anatomical drawing.

Coins, minting machinery and the smelting rooms

The tour then returns to the ground floor and the massive halls with high vaulted ceilings in which silver was processed and coins minted. The **Numismatic Room** is filled with coins of all different sizes and denominations minted in Potosí over a period of four hundred years, right through the colonial period and into the republic. The earliest silver coins – known as *macuquinas*, from the Quechua *makaicuna*, meaning "beaten things" – were crudely made using hammers and primitive die stamps. Later coins, produced with more advanced machinery, have regular edges and clearer detail. More interesting, however, are the massive wooden **laminadoras**, or rolling mills, which were used to press the silver into thin sheets from which the coins were punched. Made by Spanish craftsmen from European oak, then shipped to the Americas and carried across the Andes on the backs of mules, these huge, intricate and perfectly preserved machines are the only examples of Spanish engineering of their type and era still in existence. They were powered by mules or African slaves, who were tied to driveshafts on the floor below that in which the silver was rolled.

After this the tour continues into the **smelting rooms**, where the silver was melted down before rolling – one of these has been preserved intact, complete with furnaces and crucibles, its high ceiling stained with the soot of a thousand fires. Other smelting rooms now house a haphazard collection of carved wooden retables from some of Potosí's churches, plus other displays including a collection of arms and uniforms from Bolivia's three disastrous wars with its neighbours; a modest archeological collection featuring pre-Columbian ceramics and stone idols, as well as some rather macabre mummified Spanish babies found in the walls of San Bernardo church in 1980; and a selection of silverwork ranging from religious paraphernalia to plates and sugar bowls.

La Compañia and Santa Teresa

A block further west along Calle Ayacucho from the Casa Real de la Moneda stands **La Torre de la Compañia de Jesús** (Mon–Fri 8am–noon & 2–6pm; $1.25), the bell tower which is all that now remains of a Jesuit church originally founded in 1581. Completed in 1707 and recently restored, the grandiose tower is one of the finest eighteenth-century religious monuments in Bolivia and a sublime example of the mestizo-Baroque style, built with a triumphal arch underneath and 32 columns carved with decorative flowers and grape-laden vines. You can climb to the top of the tower, from where there are excellent panoramic **views** of the city and Cerro Rico. To get in, go up the stairs inside the municipal tourism building, whose sloping mirror-glass front reflects the tower perfectly from behind,

Double meanings: the churches of Potosí

The most striking reminder of Potosí's incredible former wealth is to be found in its magnificent **churches and convents**. With beautifully carved porticos and interiors dripping with gold leaf, they're amongst the finest examples of the Andean mestizo-Baroque style, in which Christian European and pre-Christian Andean symbolism are combined in a unique and distinctive synthesis. The churches were of course built partly as a straightforward expression of religious faith, but gratitude for the wealth of Potosí also played a part: whereas Catholic churches almost always face west, those of Potosí face due south towards Cerro Rico, so the silver mines could be blessed from the altar through their open doors. The churches also formed part of a determined effort to **convert the indigenous population** to Christianity. Spreading the Catholic faith was considered both a religious duty and a moral justification for conquest, as well as offering a powerful means of maintaining control over the new empire. Religious architecture and art therefore took on enormous importance: magnificent churches were built partly to impress the indigenous population, while paintings and sculptures provided new symbols and objects of worship to replace their now forbidden idols. This Catholic proselytization took on a special significance in Potosí. With hundreds of thousands of indigenous people from different ethnic groups spending time in the city as workers under the *mita* system, Potosí offered a perfect opportunity for inculcating the Catholic faith in the newly conquered peoples. As well as the many churches and convents built for their own use, the Spaniards built fourteen parish churches for exclusive use by the indigenous *mitayos*, each one the centre for a settlement of one or two particular ethnic groups.

With time, Christianity gained widespread acceptance amongst the indigenous population, at least on the surface. But as responsibility for building and decorating the churches in Potosí was handed over to locally trained indigenous and mestizo craftsmen and artists, a very distinct religious vision began to emerge. From the second half of the sixteenth century onwards the religious art and architecture of Potosí began incorporating more and more indigenous religious motifs in a style that became known as **mestizo-Baroque**. Using this style, local craftsmen brought the facades of the city's churches alive with tropical vegetation and fruits, inhabited by exotic birds and animals, bare-breasted caryatids and strange, idol-like figures. The sun, moon and stars – all central objects of worship in pre-Christian religion throughout the Andes – appear alongside images of Christ and the saints, and the same indigenous iconography appears in wood carvings, silverwork and oil paintings, with the Virgin Mary represented in triangular form like a mountain, clearly conflated with the Andean earth goddess Pachamama.

These developments did not pass unnoticed by the Spanish authorities. Viceroy Toledo complained that the indigenous population were constantly returning to their idols, and at one point issued an ordinance banning depictions of the sun, moon and stars. The Dominicans felt the same way about the apparent pagan iconography, but both had to cede before the force of indigenous culture, which expressed itself within the unrestricted decorative liberty of the Baroque. To some extent, no doubt, the religious authorities were happy to turn a blind eye to this. Religious syncretism works both ways, and incorporating a little Andean religious imagery into the decoration of churches may have seemed a small price to pay for getting the indigenous population to accept Christianity, albeit superficially.

Despite their beauty, however, these churches were the product of indigenous slave labour, and for all their gilded opulence they could scarcely conceal the contradiction between the avowed Christian beliefs of the Spanish mine owners who funded them and the brutal reality of the mining regime which these same men controlled. With some reason it was said that though God ruled in Potosí's 34 churches, the Devil laughed in his 6000 mines.

a rare case in Bolivia of modern architecture complementing rather than detracting from the beauty of an older monument.

Walk a block further east down Ayacucho and then turn left to reach the **Convento-Museo Santa Teresa** (daily 8.30am–noon & 2–6pm; $2.50; the ticket is also valid for the Iglesia de Jerusalén – see p.214), a beautiful colonial church and convent worth visiting both for its fine collection of colonial religious painting and sculpture, and for a somewhat disturbing insight into the bizarre lifestyle of nuns in the colonial era. Visits are by guided tour only, so you need to get here at least an hour before closing. The tours can last for over two hours, which is more than enough for most people – if you want a shorter tour, or the sheer quantity of gold leaf and religious images gets a bit much, just let the guide know. Built between 1686 and 1691 by the order of Carmelitas Descalzadas shortly after it was founded, the convent thrived on donations from rich mine owners, and once sprawled over several city blocks. It's now greatly reduced in size, and much of what is left has been converted into the museum, though some areas are still reserved for the small surviving community of nuns – after the tour you can buy some of the delicious marzipan and other sweets they make following centuries-old recipes.

During the **colonial era**, young women who entered the convent as nuns renounced the material world in order to dedicate themselves to matters spiritual, a choice no doubt made more attractive by the horrors of the mines outside. These women were mostly drawn from the families of wealthy Spanish aristocrats and mine owners, each of whom handed over a fortune in gold or property in return for their daughters' acceptance into the convent. Once inside, girls submitted to a rigid regime of prayer, work and abstinence. They were able to talk to each other for just two hours a day and were forbidden to see or be seen by outsiders – even parental visits were received behind screens. Nor was there any escape in death: nuns were buried beneath the floorboards in the lower choir, where the body of one of the founders of the order is said to be miraculously preserved, though (not surprisingly) you can't verify this for yourself.

The simple but elegant **facade** of carved pink stone, decorated with the coats of arms of the order and its two biggest funders, is the oldest example of mestizo-Baroque architecture in Potosí, dating back to 1691. Inside, the convent is a peaceful complex of interconnected courtyards, gardens and cloisters leading to rooms now filled with an exhaustive (and exhausting) collection of colonial religious art. There are more than two hundred beautifully preserved **paintings** here, including outstanding works by Melchor Pérez de Holguín and Gaspar Miguel de Berrio. Particularly interesting are the paintings of biblical scenes by Juan Luis Willca, a student of Holguín's, which feature flamingos, hummingbirds and other Andean birds; and a painting of the Last Supper in which the traditional Andean delicacy of guinea pig is served. The convent **church** features a lavish carved wooden Baroque retable smothered in gold leaf, along with a beautiful panelled wooden roof painted in *mudéjar* style, a clear indication of the Moorish influence brought by Spanish craftsmen from Andalucía.

From Santa Teresa to San Francisco

Heading south from Santa Teresa and following the street down and round to the left brings you to the **Arco de Cobija**, a colonial stone gateway that formerly marked the entrance to the Spanish city centre from the Indian parishes to the south. A block east of here along Calle Cobija stands the – by Potosí's standards – unexceptional **Iglesia de Santo Domingo**, which dates back to 1620 but was extensively remodelled in the nineteenth century in Neoclassical style. It's rarely open to the public, but if you do manage to get in before or after the Sunday-morning service it's worth checking out the carved wooden statue of the Virgen del Rosario, which was brought over from Spain in the sixteenth century and used as a model by Tupac Yupanqui when he carved the Virgen de Copacabana in 1582 (see p.138). Almost nothing remains of the once substantial Dominican monastery which was founded here in 1553 – its buildings were confiscated by the government in 1826 and served briefly as a public jail before being demolished.

A right turn down the alley beside the church brings you to the foot of Calle Chuquisaca, on and around which are some of Potosí's best preserved and most luxurious colonial town houses, their carved stone doorways decorated with the coats of arms of the Spanish noblemen who owned them. A couple of blocks south of Chuquisaca down Calle Tarija is the church and convent of San Francisco (Mon–Fri 9am–noon & 2–5pm, Sat 9.30am–noon; $2.50), now a museum and worth visiting for the views from its roof, as well as for its collection of colonial religious art – if you haven't seen enough of this already. The original church, the first to be built in Potosí, was created when the Franciscan monastery was founded in 1547, but was demolished in 1707 and replaced by the bulky structure you see today, with its multiple-domed roof and tall, square bell tower. Amongst the paintings on display inside are two big canvases by Holguín, one a luridly detailed Day of Judgement, with saints, priests and monks ascending to heaven while sinners burn or are eaten by ravening beasts in hell.

The Baroque retables that once adorned the church were removed in the early nineteenth century, and the rather dreary interior's main point of interest nowadays is the reputedly miraculous statue of the **Señor de la Vera Cruz**, the deeply venerated patron saint of Potosí, which stands behind the altar. According to legend, this statue of a crucified Christ appeared in front of the church one morning in 1550 and was adopted by the Franciscans. Christ's beard is made of real human hair and is said to need regular trimming, while the cross is also thought to grow a little each year – some believe the world will end when it reaches the floor of the church. The climb up onto the roof of the church is well worth it for the panoramic **views** of Cerro Rico and the rooftops of Potosí. You can also visit the **crypts** underneath the church, where the skulls of the monks and wealthy citizens buried here lie in heaps.

Ingenio San Marcos

Three blocks east of San Francisco along Nogales and a block south down Calle La Paz is the **Ingenio San Marcos** (Mon–Sat 2.30–6.30pm; $0.70), Potosí's only colonial-era silver foundry to have survived in a reasonable state of preservation. The *ingenio* has recently been restored and converted into a museum which provides a fascinating insight into what was, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the biggest industrial mining complex in the world. The *ingenio* was one of eighty or so foundries built in the late sixteenth century as part of the modernization programme introduced by Viceroy Toledo to improve silver production. Previously, ore had been smelted on Cerro Rico itself by the indigenous miners in small ovens known as *huayras* (Quechua for wind).

Though the surrounding area is still covered by rubble and the ruins of other defunct industrial installations, much of the colonial machinery in San Marcos is still intact. You can see the raised stone canal that carried water from the lakes and reservoirs in the mountains above the city – the water was used to power the huge waterwheel and heavy stone hammers which crushed the ore for processing – as well as the nineteenth-century furnaces used to cook the mineral ore to remove impurities before processing. Far more machinery from the age of steel and steam – including pistons to crush ore, water turbines and huge machines that used vibrations to separate different kinds of ore – is on display inside the old Republican-era plant. This also houses the *San Marcos* **restaurant** (see p.216), so if you come here to eat outside the official opening hours you can still have a look around the museum, though without the benefit of the knowledgeable guides who otherwise accompany visitors.

La Merced to San Martín

Back in the centre of town, a block east of Plaza 6 de Agosto along Calle Hoyos, stands the **Iglesia de la Merced**, completed in 1687 alongside a Mercedarian monastery dating back to 1555, with a two-level carved stone facade featuring the coat of arms of the Mercedarian order. From here, a 400-metre walk east up Calle Hoyos brings you to the much more impressive **Iglesia de San Martín**, an adobe church with a simple stone portico whose plain exterior belies a beautiful interior. The church was built in 1592 as the parish church for *mita* labourers from the Lupaca tribe, on the shores of Lago Titicaca. Inside, the walls are covered in colonial-era paintings, including individual portraits of all the archangels, whilst behind the altar stands a fabulous wooden retable covered in gold leaf and decorated in mestizo-Baroque style with delicately carved and painted flowers and fruit.

Along Calle Bolívar

Returning to La Merced, then walking two blocks north, brings you to **Calle Bolívar**, a narrow street that bustles with commercial activity as it runs down towards the Mercado Central. As you walk west you'll pass the **Casa de las Tres Portadas**, an eighteenth-century colonial house with wooden balconies hanging over the street and three highly ornate doorways imaginatively decorated with designs including the sun and moon, angels, floral patterns and gargoyle-like faces. The doorways are made of brick covered in plaster rather than carved stone, a reflection of the economic decline Potosí was undergoing by the time they were built.

A short distance further down Bolívar, a narrow alley, Calle Chacon, leads off north to the unexceptional **Iglesia de Santa Monica**, originally built in the mid-seventeenth century but remodelled several times since, most recently in the nineteenth century, when the elegant ochre Neoclassical bell tower was added. A block further down Bolívar inside a courtyard on the right is the quirky **Museo Universitario** (Mon–Fri 9am–noon & 2–6pm; $0.80), which has a rather haphazard and poorly explained collection of local archeological finds, including the usual deliberately deformed skulls (see p.122), ceramics, arrowheads and mastodon teeth.

At the end of the same block Bolívar crosses Calle Junín. A short distance off to the left is the **Casa de los Marqueses de Otavi**, a colonial mansion (now occupied by the Banco Nacional de Bolivia) with a strikingly carved mestizo-Baroque stone facade – unusual in a non-religious building – featuring two lions with near-human faces holding aloft a coat of arms, flanked by images of the sun and moon. If you turn right down Calle Junín and then right again you'll reach the narrow, twisting alley known as **El Pasaje de las Siete Vueltas** ("Seven-turn Passage"), the only remnant in the Spanish city centre of the disorderly street plan which existed before Viceroy Toledo ordered it relaid.

Just east of the intersection with Junín on the right-hand side is the seventeenth-century **Iglesia de San Agustín**, which was the church used by

Potosí's substantial Basque community in the colonial era. Only the simple but elegant Renaissance portico survives from the original structure, and the bare interior is rarely open.

Mercado Central and San Lorenzo de Carangas

Another block down Bolívar is the bustling **Mercado Central**, Potosí's lively covered central market – some of the stallholders here still wear the tall, wide-rimmed stove-pipe hats that are the traditional attire of Potosina women. Behind the market on the corner of Bustillos and Heroes del Chaco stands the spectacular **Iglesia de San Lorenzo de Carangas**, whose splendid carved stone portal is perhaps the defining example of the mestizo-Baroque architectural style in Potosí. One of the first churches in Potosí when it was built in the mid-sixteenth century, it was initially called La Anunciación and used only by the Spanish, but was renamed a few decades later when it became the parish church for *mitayos* belonging to the Carangas tribe from the Lago Poopó region.

The richly decorated **doorway** was created by indigenous craftsmen in the eighteenth century, when the church was thoroughly remodelled. It features fantastically intricate floral patterns intertwined with twisting vines laden with grapes and angels' faces, while the inner arch on either side of the door is supported by bizarre carved figures of bare-breasted women. Stranger still are the mermaids who strum guitars above the doorway. Surrounded by a carved sun, moon and stars – classic Andean religious iconography – these sirens are thought to represent creatures who figure in legends of the powerful mountain god Thunupa, a volcano on the Altiplano south of Oruro. The central niche above the doorway is occupied by a winged archangel dressed in contemporary Spanish costume and armed with sword and shield – a suggestion, perhaps, that the indigenous artists were well aware of the contradiction between the ideals of Christianity and the harsh military reality which underwrote Spanish power and the presence of the Catholic Church in the Andes.

San Bernardo and Jerusalén

From the Mercado Central, Calle Oruro runs northwest to the university and the **Plaza del Estudiante**, which is flanked by two colonial churches. On the south side stands the bulky **Iglesia de San Bernardo**, built from uncut stone blocks and completed in 1731. It now houses the workshops used in the ongoing restoration of Potosí's churches and other historic buildings, and though it's not officially open to the public, you can usually have a peep inside at the stone and wood carvings which are taken there for restoration. On the north side of the plaza, the small, late seventeenth-century **Iglesia de Jerusalén** (Mon–Fri 3–7pm, Sat 9am–noon; $1, or free with tickets for Santa Teresa – see p.211) has been converted into a museum featuring yet more colonial religious art. There's some good stuff here, including an extravagant eighteenth-century mestizo-Baroque retable covered in gold leaf, and an ornate carved pulpit decorated with tiny pictures painted on bronze by Melchor Peréz de Holguín. Of the many paintings of religious scenes, the most unusual is a portrait of **Francisco de Aguirre**, a wealthy mine owner who turned his back on worldly goods to become a priest, and is now buried in the walls of the church. In the picture (to the right as you face the altar) Aguirre holds his heart in his hand to surrender to Christ, whilst stepping on a prostrate Cupid (in rejection of his womanizing past) and ignoring the calls of his erstwhile friends, who are attempting to inveigle him back to a life of vice.

The southern outskirts

South of the city centre, the lower slopes of Cerro Rico were formerly the site of ten of the fourteen *parroquias de Indios* (Indian parishes), which were established to house the many thousands of indigenous labourers who came here to work in the mines under the *mita* system. The Indian parishes were divided from the Spanish city centre by **La Ribera**, an artificial river built to provide water for the foundries (*ingenios*) in which ore was processed, and though the waters of the river now run underground, the difference between the two halves of the city is still quite pronounced. The southern side was never laid out according to Spanish colonial town-planning regulations, and so the street plan is much more disordered, with narrow, cobbled streets winding between crumbling colonial and nineteenth-century houses of adobe or rough-cut stone, topped with sagging tiled roofs. These are interspersed with more modern but equally ramshackle brick homes that creep up the slope of Cerro Rico, ending with rows of semi-abandoned tin-roofed miners' cottages built by the state in the 1960s and 1970s. Many of the colonial parish **churches** still survive, though they're by no means as spectacular as those in the city centre and their interiors are rarely open to the public – the best time to catch a glimpse inside them is on Saturday evening or Sunday morning between 7.30am and 9am.

From the **Arco de Cobija**, the colonial arch which marks the old border between the indigenous and Spanish cities, Calle Mejillones leads uphill and southwest to a second arch, the **Arco de Mejillones**, and then down to the Plaza Diego Huallpa and the crumbling **Iglesia de San Benito**, which was the parish church for *mitayos* from the Cochabamba region and the Collas of Orcosuyo. Originally built between 1711 and 1727 and extensively modified since, San Benito is a hulking structure of rough cut stone with nine whitewashed domes that give it the appearance of a mosque. On your way back up Mejillones on the right you can see the simple, ochre-painted adobe tower that's all that remains of the **Iglesia de Santa Bárbara**, which dates from the earliest years of the city and was the parish church of the Collas from Omasuyos. If you then turn right and work your way east along Calle Guzmán you'll reach the **Iglesia de Copacabana**, completed in 1685 in honour of the Virgin of Copacabana and notable for the *mudéjar* carved wooden ceiling and the stone retable behind the altar.

Continue east from here then turn south after three blocks to reach the **Iglesia de San Pedro**, whose simple, whitewashed mestizo-Baroque facade dates from 1725, when the church was rebuilt. A couple of blocks southeast of here is the **Plaza El Minero**, centred on a statue of a revolutionary miner who stands helmeted and bare-chested above an open mine shaft with a drill in one hand and a rifle raised triumphantly above his head in the other. In a city full of monuments to the glory of God, this is one of only two dedicated to the people who actually created the city's wealth. From here you can make your way southeast to **Plaza El Calvario** at the top of Calle Hernandez, where you'll find shops and stalls selling all manner of mining supplies, including essentials such as coca, alcohol and dynamite – tours stop here on their way up to visit the mines at Cerro Rico. For an alternative route back down to the city centre from the Plaza Minero, head down Calle Arenas to the north. A block before you reach the Ingenio San Marcos you'll pass the **Iglesia de San Sebastián**, the parish church for *mitayos* from Canchis in what is now southern Peru. Originally built in 1581, the church lost most of its distinctive mestizo-Baroque features when it was restored in 1854, but still boasts an elegant portico decorated with a distinctive shell motif.

Eating, drinking and nightlife

Potosí's popularity with travellers is reflected in the city's growing variety of **places to eat**, with more and more cafés and restaurants offering vegetarian food and travellers' favourites like pizza and pasta. Don't miss out, though, on the tasty and distinctive local cuisine, particularly the thick, warming, carbohydrate-laden soups and meat dishes cooked in spicy sauces. The **Mercado Central** on Calle Bolívar is the best place to eat if you're on a budget, with coffee, pastries and *api* – a delicious hot thick maize drink flavoured with cloves and cinnamon – served up from early in the morning, as well as juices, soups and main courses throughout the day. The *salteñas* and *empanadas* sold by street vendors throughout the city also make tasty snacks.

Outside the main fiestas, local **nightlife** is fairly low-key. A few of the city's restaurants and cafés double as **bars** where you can escape the night-time cold with a warming *singani* or a beer, and several places stage frequent **live folk music** performances.

Restaurants, cafés and bars

Café 4.060 Hoyos 1. Stylish modern café featuring organic coffee from Las Yungas – all grown at altitude exceeding 4060m. Also serves tasty but somewhat expensive pastas, pizzas and Mexican food ($3).

Café Top Matos and Boulevard. Cosy candlelit hideaway serving a decent cup of coffee, a wide -range of liqueur-laced hot drinks to chase the cold away, and an impressive range of cocktails.

La Candelaria Ayacucho 5. Mellow second-floor travellers' café opposite the Casa Real de la Moneda serving up a combination of traditional Bolivian dishes like roast llama and international favourites like pizza and burgers. It opens early for breakfast, has tasty cakes and snacks and a good vegetarian set *almuerzo* ($1.50), as well as a book exchange, tourist information and Internet access.

Chaplin Matos and Quijjaro. Friendly little café attracting a young local crowd with a wide range of inexpensive snacks, including burgers and delicious *empanadas*, as well as juices and decent coffee. Closed Sun.

Cherry's Salón de Té Padilla 8. Refined tearoom which is extremely popular for its very good homemade cakes, biscuits, pastries and pies. Also serves fairly good pasta and other more substantial dishes.

Doña Eugenia Opposite the cemetery just off Chayanta. Popular and inexpensive little restaurant on the outskirts of the town which is worth visiting as it's about the only place you can still get a regional speciality *kala phurka*, a thick, spicy maize soup served in earthenware bowls into which a hot stone is plunged just before serving, so it stays piping hot and bubbles like a volcano as you eat it.

Le Boulevard Bolívar 853. Upmarket French restaurant serving a mix of French and Bolivian dishes. It's popular at lunchtime for its good set *almuerzo*, but less so in the evening, when à la carte dishes go for about $4.

La Manzana Magica Oruro 239. Welcoming hole-in-the-wall vegetarian restaurant serving hearty breakfasts, good-value set *almuerzos* and a wide variety of salads and snacks, including seven different kinds of veggie-burgers. Closed Sun evening.

Potocchi Millares 13. Small café-restaurant serving reasonable traditional Bolivian and international food – it's worth visiting for the live folkloric music shows it hosts several nights a week, when there's a small cover charge.

Pub La Casona Frias 41. The liveliest nightspot in town, housed in an eighteenth-century mansion whose inside walls are decorated with contemporary graffiti. The atmosphere is friendly, with ice-cold beer and good but expensive food ($3) including excellent trout. Live folk music on Thurs nights.

San Marcos Inside the Ingenio San Marcos museum, La Paz with Betanzos. One of the best restaurants in town, with glass tables mounted on restored pieces of nineteenth-century industrial machinery and a menu of hearty Bolivian traditional dishes like llama steak for about $5, plus an excellent set *almuerzo* for just under $3. You can also have a look round the museum (see p.212) while you're here.

Sumaj Orcko Quijjaro 46. Inexpensive restaurant serving large portions of hearty local cuisine and good-value set *almuerzos*. Regional specialities worth trying here include *picante de viscacha* – a large Andean rabbit-like animal cooked in a spicy sauce – and *perdiz* – a partridge-like game bird. Closed Sun.

Moving on from Potosí

Buses to Cochabamba, La Paz, Oruro, Sucre, Tarija, Tupiza and Villazón depart regularly from the Terminal de Buses on Avenida Universitario. Buses for **Uyuni** leave from the various bus company offices on the corner of Avenida Universitario and Sevilla, two blocks up from the terminal. Most long-distance departures are in the morning or evening for overnight journeys – you can check departure times by calling the **bus information office** (daily 7am–noon & 2–8pm; ⓣ02/6227354). Ticket offices are on the first floor, and departing passengers must buy a $0.30 ticket to use the terminal before boarding their bus. If you're heading to **Sucre** you can save time by travelling in one of the collective taxis that depart from the back of the bus terminal as soon as they have at least four passengers. These are faster, more comfortable and depart more frequently than the buses, and cost only about $1 more per person. Though Potosí has an **airport**, there are no regular passenger services. The nearest airport with scheduled flights is at Sucre, about three hours away by road. You can buy airline tickets in advance from AeroSur (ⓣ02/6228988) on Cobija just off Plaza 10 de Noviembre.

Shopping

Unsurprisingly, Potosí is home to a fair number of **silversmiths**, though they tend to produce traditional religious ornaments and household items like teaspoons rather than fashionable jewellery. There are several shops selling silverwork on Bolívar and Sucre, but be careful buying silver from street stalls, especially if it seems very cheap, since its purity is often lower than the sellers would have you believe. A wide variety of beautiful **textiles** (*tejidos*) can also be bought – they're hand-woven by different indigenous groups in the region, the most famous weaving communities including Potolo, Chayanta and Calcha. With their complex, multicoloured designs, laden with symbolism, these make excellent souvenirs, though larger pieces, like the ponchos worn by men and the *llijllas* (shawls) worn by women, can cost $50–100 if the quality is good, even more if they are antique. If your budget doesn't stretch to this, you can always buy a smaller *chumpi* (a kind of waistband) or a knitted woollen hat for a dollar or two. Textiles are sold from shops on Sucre and in the **Mercado Artesanal** on the corner of Sucre and Omiste, where you can also find a good range of other souvenirs including beautiful hand-crafted **musical instruments** like charangos and many different types of Andean reed pipes and flutes. There's also a cooperative shop selling weavings from Calcha beside the Ingenio San Marcos on La Paz.

Listings

Banks and exchange The Banco Nacional de Bolivia on Bolívar changes cash and traveller's cheques, and several shops along Bolívar change US dollars cash. There are several ATMs where you can withdraw cash on Visa or Mastercard, including the Banco de Crédito, on Bolívar and Sucre.

Bus information ⓣ02/6227354.

Internet access There are plenty of Internet cafés in town: try *Candelaria*, on Ayacucho opposite the Casa Real de la Moneda.

Laundry Lavarap, corner of Quijjaro and Matos.

Post office Correo Central, a block south of Plaza 10 de Noviembre on Lanza and Chuquisaca.

Telephone office ENTEL, Av Camacho and Plaza Arce.

Around Potosí

There are a couple of worthwhile excursions from Potosí most importantly Cerro Rico and the mining history of the area. Immediately southeast of the city, the **Cordillera Kari Kari** is a good place for hiking amidst the lakes which provided water for the silver-processing *ingenios*. To the northeast, the natural **hot springs** at Tarapaya make a calming place to relax and get the Altiplano cold out of your bones.

Cerro Rico

There are those who, having entered only out of curiosity to see that horrible labyrinth, have come out totally robbed of colour, grinding their teeth and unable to pronounce a word; they have not known even how to ponder it nor make reference to the horrors that are in there.

Bartolomé Arzans de Orsua,
Historia de la Villa Imperial de Potosí, 1703

Immediately south of Potosí the near-perfect cone of **Cerro Rico** (Sumaj Orko in Quechua) rises above the city, its slopes stained in startling hues of red and yellow by centuries of mining waste, and pockmarked with the entrances to the thousands of mines that lead deep into its entrails. Though Potosí's famous silver is now pretty much exhausted, many of the shafts are still worked by miners who eke out a marginal existence from the ores still to be found there. For many travellers a visit to one of the mines is a highlight of their trip to Potosí, an amazing and disturbing journey into the bowels of the earth that also feels like a trip back in time, so primitive are the working conditions inside. No less fascinating are the customs, rituals and beliefs that sustain the Quechua-speaking miners in their back-breaking labour.

All the agencies listed in the box on p.206 run regular **tours** to the mines. These last half a day and should cost the official rate of $10 per person, though some companies charge less than this, particularly outside the June to September high season. Almost all the guides are former miners themselves and so really know what they're talking about, though few speak more than limited English. Groups should be no bigger than eight people, and you should be provided with rubber boots, a mining jacket or overalls, safety helmet and headlamp. Be warned, though, that this is an unpleasant and highly dangerous environment, where **safety precautions** are largely left to supernatural forces. The mines are dirty, wet, muddy and very claustrophobic. The air inside is fetid with dust and gases, including arsenic, and the chances of being hit by falling rocks or a speeding mine trolley are real. Many of the tunnels are narrow and have low ceilings, and temperatures can reach over 40°C, so walking and crawling through the mines would be exhausting even if the entrances weren't situated at over 4000m above sea level. Of every group of eight or so visitors, one or two usually head for the exit within ten minutes of entering the mine – if you don't like it, your guide will lead you out. Once inside the mine, tours generally involve walking, crawling and clambering through often dirty and narrow tunnels deep underground for two or three hours – you should be reasonably fit and altitude-acclimatized, and it's not a good idea to visit if you have heart or respiratory difficulties or are claustrophobic. Some people also question the ethics of making a tourist attraction of a workplace where conditions are so appalling. That said, however, most people who do visit the mines find the experience one of the most unforgettable in Bolivia.

Tours of the mines begin with a visit to the **miners' market** on and around Plaza El Calvario, where you can buy coca, dynamite, black-tobacco cigarettes, pure cane alcohol and fizzy soft drinks – you should take a selection of these as gifts for the miners you'll be visiting. About 7000 miners still work in Cerro Rico, including 1000 children, divided between around 27 different mining

Sympathy for the Devil: El Tío

In every mine, usually in an alcove just beyond the point from which the last ray of sunlight can be seen, you'll find a statue of a sinister horned and bearded figure complete with erect phallus and leering smile. Known as **El Tío** – Uncle – this demonic character is considered the king of the underworld, to whom sacrifices must be made and homage paid if miners are to find rich mineral deposits and emerge from the mine unscathed. El Tío is given regular libations of alcohol and offerings of coca and lit cigarettes, particularly on Fridays, when the miners spend an hour or more sitting together with their Tío drinking and chewing coca. At certain times of the year, blood sacrifices are also made to the Tío, with llamas being slaughtered outside the mine entrance to assuage a thirst for blood which might otherwise be satisfied only by the death of a miner. Though El Tío is clearly related to pre-Columbian mountain deities and is never referred to as the Devil by name, there's little doubt that he owes much to Christian belief. When the first *mitayos* heard Spanish priests describe heaven and hell, they can only have concluded that the mines were hell itself. If that was so, then they were working in the Devil's domain, and it was to him that they had to look for succour. To this day most miners are Christians when above ground, taking part in fiestas and worshipping Christ and the Virgin. But once inside the mines, it is to the owner of the minerals and the king of the underworld that they pray.

cooperatives. The most commonly visited mines include Candelaria, Santa Rita, Santa Rosita and Rosario.

Most of the miners are reworking old colonial silver mines for tin, lead and other less valuable metals, so the **entrances** to the shafts tend to be lined with stone facing dating back to the colonial era. As you descend deeper, though, the passageways become narrower and less well made. When a vein of ore is discovered a dynamite charge is placed to break up the rock, which is then extracted using picks and crowbars and carried up to the main shaft on the backs of men, then taken to the surface on a wheeled wagon running along narrow rails. The miners work in shift teams who divide the profits of what they extract on an equal basis, though some of those working in the mines – particularly the children – are paid a fixed daily wage as employees. The miners are generally proud of their work and the hardship they endure, and are usually happy to talk about their lives with visitors. Many of the miners previously worked in large state-run mines, but were made redundant after the great tin crash of 1985; others are campesinos who come to work in the mines for short periods on a seasonal basis. Few earn more than a marginal living, though stories abound of those who have struck lucky and uncovered a rich silver seam – the dream of making such a discovery sustains many in their labour, though the price of pursuing this dream is invariably an early grave. Life expectancy in the mines is about fifteen years, with most miners falling victim to silicosis, a deadly lung disease caused by inhaling silica dust. Cave-ins and other accidents claim the lives of many others. Most of the mining cooperatives run limited pension and life-insurance schemes, though these are seldom sufficient to support the family of a miner who loses his life.

Given such terrible working conditions, it's no surprise that the miners turn to stimulants and religion to help them through the day. Few eat when they are underground, even during long shifts, relying for sustenance instead on coca leaves, harsh black-tobacco cigarettes and the occasional swig of neat cane alcohol. Today, as in the colonial era, coca is considered an essential requirement without which work in the mines would be impossible. Miners spend a good hour chewing coca before entering the shaft to begin work, and all agree that it helps them endure the heat, exhaustion and backbreaking labour. Coca, tobacco and alcohol are also taken in as offerings to **El Tío** – the supernatural being who is believed to own the mine's silver and other metals (see box, p.219).

Cordillera Kari Kari

The **Cordillera Kari Kari** is home to a network of artificial lakes, dams, aqueducts and dykes that Viceroy Toledo ordered built in the late sixteenth century to ensure the supply of water to the *ingenios* in Potosí. By contemporary standards, the artificial lakes represented a monumental feat of construction, employing 20,000 indigenous forced labourers and taking the best part of half a century to complete. During peak silver production there were 32 lakes, but only a few now survive to supply the city's water. In 1625 the retaining wall supporting laguna San Sebastian burst, washing away entire blocks of the city and killing thousands of people.

Set amid arid red-brown mountains, the lakes are easily reached from the city and make a good place for one or two days' **hiking**, albeit at altitudes of up to

Tinku: ritual combat in the Andes

Of all the traditions practised by indigenous communities in the Bolivian Andes, perhaps none appears so strange to outsiders as the **Tinku**, a form of ritual hand-to-hand combat that still takes place on certain feast days in some small rural towns in the northern areas of Potosí department. During the *Tinku*, young men from two rival communities (*ayllus*) take turns to engage in bloody one-on-one fist fights in the midst of a drunken and raucous fiesta. The young fighters wear leather helmets modelled on those worn by the Spanish conquistadors, and leather breastplates for protection. They bind their fists with woven belts, sometimes adding a stone in the palm of their hand to add extra force to their blows.

The two-or three-day fiestas start with the arrival of the young men from their home villages, marching in close order and playing long panpipes known as *suqusu*. The individual clashes take place in a charged atmosphere of music, dancing and drunkenness. Townspeople and sometimes the police oversee proceedings, but as the fiesta goes on things often escalate beyond their control, with pitched battles between rival *ayllus* breaking out, and it's rare for a year to go by without someone being killed in the *Tinku* somewhere in the northern Potosí region. That said, bloodshed is perhaps the most important part of the ritual: as well as serving as a warlike rite of passage for young men, the *Tinku* acts as a fertility rite during which blood must be shed on both sides to satisfy the earth goddess, *Pachamama*, and ensure a bountiful harvest. The *Tinku* is also an important way of reaffirming indigenous cultural identity, and can help defuse all too real conflicts between communities that can otherwise erupt into more serious violence. Unmarried young women also sometimes fight in the *Tinku*, though their aim is usually to pull hair and rip clothes rather than draw blood. The Bolivian authorities generally disapprove, considering the *Tinku* primitive and atavistic, although anyone who's seen the blood lust of spectators at a boxing match will recognize that such violent rituals are by no means confined to the Andes.

The best-known *Tinku* takes place in the community of **Macha**, 120km north of Potosí, in the first week of May, but there are several others in small villages in the region at other times of the year (including Torotoro; see p.283). It is possible to visit these fiestas, and one or two tour companies in Potosí (see p.206) take groups along each year. Be warned, though, that these violent and alcoholic spectacles often get out of hand and it's easy for an outsider to unwittingly provoke trouble. If you do visit, go with a Bolivian guide who knows the area, stay clear of the crowds, don't take photographs without permission and generally exercise maximum cultural sensitivity.

5000m. If you're planning to stay overnight you'll need your own food and camping gear, and you'll have to be prepared for sub-zero temperatures. Alternatively, you can go on an organized trip with one of the tour companies in Potosí (see box, p.206), who will organize food, camping equipment and transport. To reach the lakes by foot, walk up to Plaza Sucre along Calle Chuquisaca, then follow the road to the southeast that turns into a track leading up into the mountains. The first lake, about 5km from the city centre, is **Laguna San Sebastián**, which is supported by a massive retaining wall, built by hand in the sixteenth century. From here you can head across the ridge to the northeast to **Laguna San Idelfonso**, about 1.5km away, or continue south along the remains of an abandoned aqueduct towards lagunas **Pisco Cocha** and **Chalaviri**. Keep sight of Cerro Rico and you shouldn't have any problems finding your way back to Potosí.

Tarapaya hot springs

For something more relaxing, the *aguas termales* (hot springs) at **Tarapaya**, 25km northwest of Potosí, can be visited as a half-day trip from the city. Known as **El Ojo del Inca** (The Eye of the Inca), the natural hot spring bubbles up into a perfectly circular pool about 50m in diameter – it's believed to have curative powers and, according to legend, was visited by Inca Huayna Capac for just this purpose. The greenish waters are pleasantly warm, though as with all hot springs you should check the temperature before jumping in. Locals advise strongly against swimming out into the bubbling centre of the pool, where they say occasional whirlpools can suck unwary bathers to their doom – best be careful and stay close to the edge.

Micros to Tarapaya leave every half-hour or so from Avenida Universitaria. To get to the Ojo del Inca, take a micro to Tarapaya and ask to be dropped off just after the bridge before Tarapaya, from where it's a ten-minute walk up the track that climbs to the left – entrance costs $1. Alternatively, a return trip by **taxi** (with around an hour's waiting time at the spring) will cost about $8. There are further hot springs beyond Tarapaya in the resort village of **Miraflores**, but these have been channelled into drab concrete swimming pools that are usually busy with local children and lack the natural appeal of the Ojo del Inca.

Uyuni

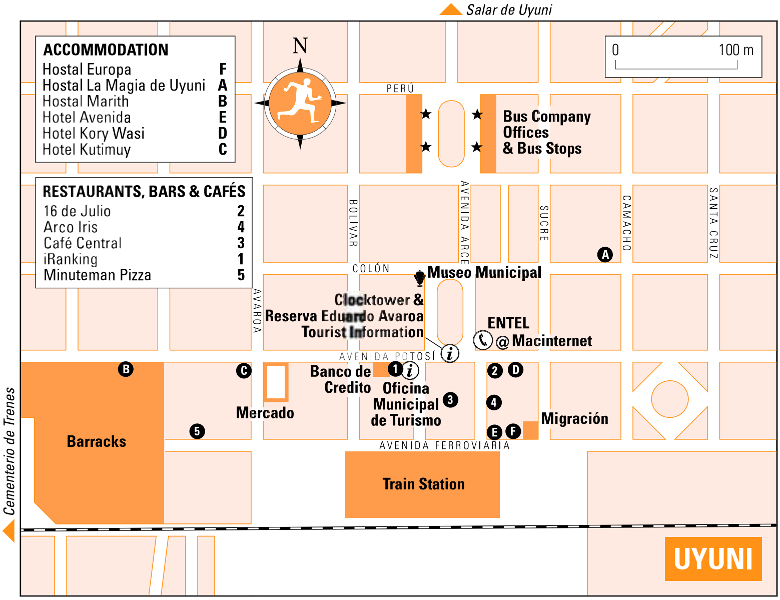
Set on the bleak southern Altiplano 212km southwest of Potosí, the cold and windswept railway town of **UYUNI** has little to recommend it except its usefulness as a jumping-off point for expeditions into the beautiful and remote landscapes of the far southwest. Founded in 1889 at the junction of the railways that enter Bolivia from Chile and Argentina, in its heyday Uyuni was Bolivia's main gateway to the outside world and a symbol of modernity and industrial progress. Today, by contrast, its streets are lined with a collection of shabby, tin-roofed houses and semi-abandoned railway yards filled with the decaying skeletons of redundant trains. Given the decline in the fortunes of Bolivia's railways, it's surprising Uyuni hasn't become a ghost town like many of the mining settlements whose ore exports once passed through it. That it hasn't is due to the ever-growing number of travellers who come here to visit the spectacular scenery of the **Salar de Uyuni** and the **Reserva de Fauna Andina Eduardo Avaroa**, which are usually visited together on a four-day tour from Uyuni.

Arrival and information

Uyuni is a small town, and everything you might need is concentrated within a few blocks. The **train station** is on Avenida Ferroviaria, right in the centre of town. **Buses** from Potosí, Oruro and Tupiza pull up in front of the various bus company offices (an area optimistically described as "the terminal"), three blocks north of the train station along the partly pedestrianized Avenida Arce.

There are a couple of **tourist information offices** in Uyuni. Easily the most useful is the privately run iRanking, half a block west of the clocktower on Potosí on the second floor (daily 8.30am–8pm; ☎02/6932101). The helpful staff maintains a well-populated database of reviews of the multitude of tour operators offering tours of the Reserva Eduardo Avaroa and Salar de Uyuni. The Reserva Eduardo Avaroa has an information office located inside the nineteenth-century clocktower at the junction of avenidas Arce and Potosí (Mon–Fri 9.30am–12.30pm & 2.30–7.30pm; ☎02/6932400). You can pick up a good free leaflet on the reserve here, and they also sell a nice little Spanish-language illustrated guide to the birds of the reserve and a delightful book (available in English or Spanish) about the Salar de Uyuni. The Oficina Municipal de Turismo is just across the road on the corner of Arce and Potosí, but the opening hours are irregular and even when the staff do turn up they're not much help. It's only really worth coming here if you want to complain about a tour agency. The **tour agencies** themselves, all situated within a few blocks of Avenida Arce, can be a good source of information as well for planning a trip to the Salar and the reserve, though obviously their main aim is to sell you a trip.

There are several **Internet cafés** which open sporadically on and around the clocktower at the intersection of Potosí and Arce – Macinternet is the most reliable. The **ENTEL** office is just south of the clocktower on Avenida Arce. The Banco de Crédito on Potosí between Arce and Bolívar will change


Salar de Uyuni
ACCOMMODATION
Hostal Europa F
Hostal La Magia de Uyuni A
Hostal Marith B
Hotel Avenida E
Hotel Kory Wasi D
Hotel Kutimuy C
RESTAURANTS, BARS & CAFÉS
16 de Julio 2
Arco Iris 4
Café Central 3
iRanking 1
Minuteman Pizza 5
N
0 100 m
PERÚ
Bus Company Offices & Bus Stops
BOLIVAR
AVENIDA ARCE
SUCRE
CAMACHO
SANTA CRUZ
COLÓN
Museo Municipal
AVAROA
Clocktower & Reserva Eduardo Avaroa Tourist Information
ENTEL
@ Macinternet
AVENIDA POTOSÍ
Banco de Credito
Oficina Municipal de Turismo
Mercado
Migración
Barracks
AVENIDA FERROVIARIA
Train Station
Cementerio de Trenes
UYUNI

dollars and has an ATM that accepts Visa and Mastercard. Most tour agencies will change dollars and take traveller's cheques as payment, and some occasionally accept payment by credit card and change traveller's cheques for a hefty commission, but it's best not to have to count on it. The **migración** is on Potosí between Arce and Sucre. You'll need to get an exit stamp here if you're heading into Chile by train via Avaroa (see p.224). If you're crossing **into Chile** at Laguna Verde in the Reserva Eduardo Avaroa you can usually get a stamp at the border – check with the tour agency that's taking you or ask at the *migración* just to make sure. If you need extra **warm clothing** for your trip to the Salar you can buy woollen jumpers, hats, gloves, socks and ponchos from the street stalls along Potosí.

Accommodation

There's a limited range of **accommodation** in Uyuni, and most of it is pretty basic, though a couple of more upmarket places now exist where you'll get a warm room and a comfortable bed – most places stay open late for train passengers arriving in the middle of the night. Places can fill up between June and September, when it may be worth booking a room in advance if you're arriving late.

Hostal Europa Av Ferroviaria and Sucre ☎02/6932752. Far from "the best" that the sign proclaims: the staff are friendly, but the basic rooms are grubby and a long way from the shared showers. ②

Hostal La Magia de Uyuni Colón 432 ☎02/6932541, Ⓔmagia_uyuni@yahoo.es. One of the more upscale options in town with pleasant rooms with attractive rustic decor and private bath set around a warm, plastic-roofed courtyard. Breakfast included. ⑤–⑥

Hostal Marith Potosí 61 ☎02/6932174. Simple and clean but very cold rooms, with or without bath. Breakfast available. ②–③

Hotel Avenida Av Ferroviaria 11 ☎02/6932078. The biggest and best budget option in town, with clean, functional rooms with or without bath set around a sunny central courtyard. It's close to the train station and big enough to ensure that getting a room is rarely a problem. ②

Hotel Kory Wasi Av Potosí 304 ☎02/6932670, Ⓔkory_wasi@hotmail.com. Cosy rooms sporting comfortable beds and private bath, all set around a sunny, plastic-roofed central hallway. Breakfast included. ④

Hotel Kutimuy Av Potosí and Avaroa ☎02/6932391. The tallest building in town, and popular with big tour groups, with clean, modern, parquet-floored rooms (with or without bath) and a sunny rooftop cafeteria with good views over the town. Breakfast included. ④

The Town

At 3668m above sea level and with no shelter from the wind, Uyuni is a bitterly cold town that has little to distract you for more than an hour or two. The effective centre of town is the nineteenth-century **clocktower** at the intersection of Arce and Potosí. Half a block north of here on the left-hand side of Arce is the small **Museo Municipal** (Mon–Fri 9.30am–12.30pm & 2.30–6pm; $0.20), whose random collection of skulls, mummies, potshards and other archeological finds from the region offers a reasonable way of passing twenty minutes. On Avenida Ferroviaria in front of the station are two monuments to the golden age of steam: the first, a **statue** of a railway worker, spanner in hand; the second, a well-maintained **steam locomotive**, made in West Yorkshire in the early twentieth century.

If you've an hour or two to kill, it's worth walking west out of town down Avenida Ferroviaria and along the railway line for about fifteen minutes to the **Cementerio de Trenes** (Train Cemetery). Set on the desolate fringe of the Salar de Uyuni, with good views back towards the town, this graveyard of rusting steam locomotives, passenger carriages and freight wagons that used to

Moving on from Uyuni

If you're heading north to Oruro and beyond, or south to Tupiza and Villazón, you should travel by **train** if possible, as the line passes through stunning scenery – see p.248 for full details of trains and schedules. **Buses** leave from the company offices north of the clocktower. There are several departures to **Potosí** every morning and evening (7–8hr). Buses to **Oruro** (9hr), with connections to **La Paz** (a further 3hr 30min), travel by night only. Buses to **Tupiza** (9hr) operated by Flota 11 de Julio leave twice a week on Wednesdays and Sundays at 10am, and smaller, and faster, *rapiditos* (obscenely overcrowded minibuses) leave early every morning between 5 and 6am.

Crossing the Chilean border

There are two ways of **crossing into Chile** from Uyuni. Twice a week, on Mondays at 3am and Thursdays at 2.40pm, a passenger train travels from Uyuni to **Calama** in Chile via the Bolivian border post of **Avaroa**, a spectacular journey along the southern edge of the Salar and through stunning high Andean scenery. If you're travelling this way you'll need to get an exit stamp at the *migración* in Uyuni. A more popular route into Chile is across the border at **Laguna Verde** in the far south of the Reserva Eduardo Avaroa. Most of the tour agencies will happily drop you off here during the tour and arrange transport across the border into Chile and on to the town of **San Pedro de Atacama**. You can get your exit stamp at the border here, though the border officials have been known to charge small unauthorized fees for letting you cross. The best agency to do this with is **Colque Tours**, who have their own transport on the Chilean side and an office in San Pedro de Atacama. Note that by doing this you cross the border only after seeing all the highlights of the standard tour of the Salar de Uyuni and Reserva Eduardo Avaroa, missing out only on the arduous return journey from Laguna Verde to Uyuni.

carry ore from long-abandoned mines is a sombre monument to the past glory of the age of steam and steel, as well as a popular but dangerous adventure playground for local children.

Eating and drinking

As with accommodation, the range of places **to eat** in Uyuni is pretty limited. There are a few restaurants concentrated around the pedestrianized Plaza Arce, offering generally overpriced and mediocre gringo-oriented food: pizza and American breakfasts are ubiquitous. Otherwise, you can find soups, juices and snacks in the indoor market on Potosí, though it's far from being the most hygienic in Bolivia. If you're heading out to the Salar and beyond for a few days, it's worth taking along some extra food supplies – biscuits, chocolate, fruit and the like – which you can buy from the market and the surrounding shops.

16 de Julio Plaza Arce. Warm, glass-fronted restaurant serving up a good, filling four-course set *almuerzo* for just over $2, as well as the usual pizza and Bolivian meat dishes.

Arco Iris Plaza Arce. Decent but rather expensive pizza and pasta in a cosy ambience with good background music. Popular with travellers, particularly in the evenings, despite the very slow service.

Café Central Plaza Arce. Tucked away under the bandstand with plenty of outdoor seating where you can soak up the sun's rays while enjoying hot drinks, juices, decent breakfasts and snacks.

Minuteman Pizza Av Ferroviaria 60. Though it's a bit of a walk from the centre, the Minuteman chain serves up the best pizza in town from its location inside the *Toñito Hotel*.

iRanking Av Potosí. Attractive travellers' café with an attached tourist office serves up the typical pizza and pasta as well some more unique fare for Bolivia such as raclette and fondue – all paired with one of the more extensive drink menus around.

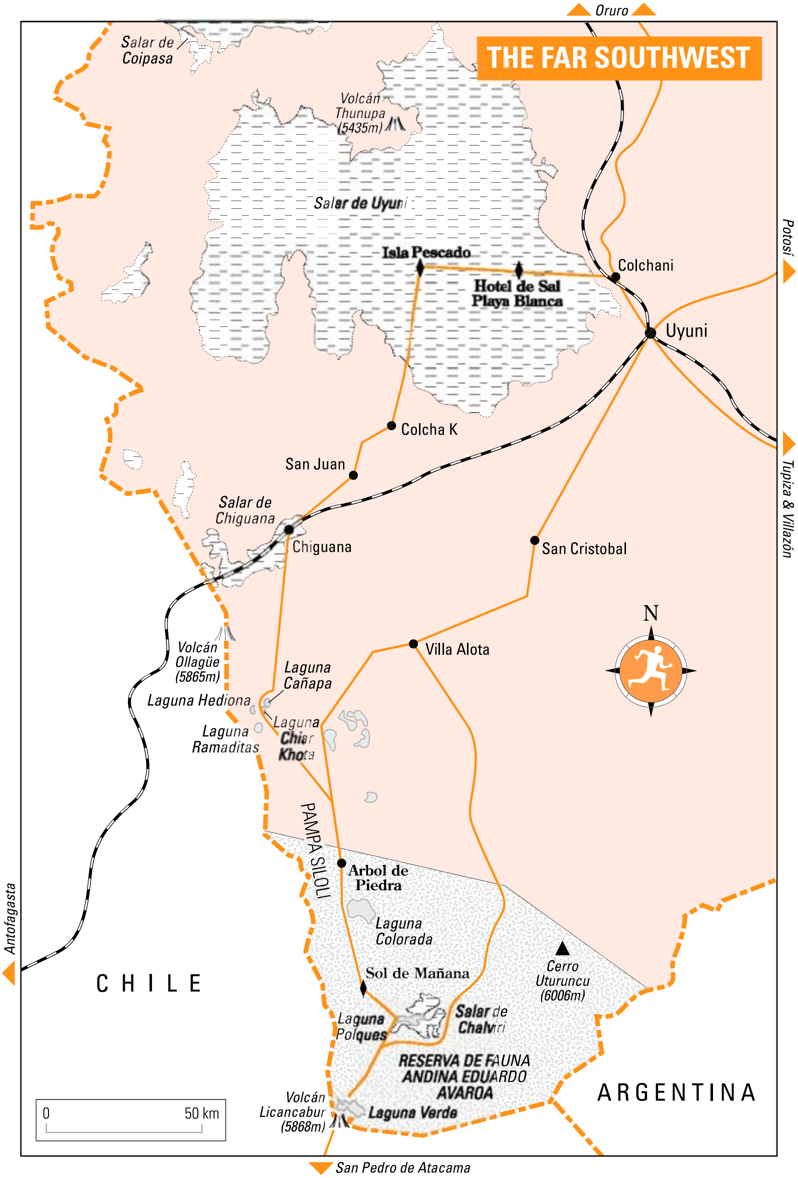
The far southwest: the Salar de Uyuni and Reserva Eduardo Avaroa

Covering some 9000 square kilometres of the Altiplano west of Uyuni, the **Salar de Uyuni** is by far the biggest salt lake in the world, and one of Bolivia's most extraordinary attractions. The Salar is not a lake in any conventional sense of the word: though below the surface it is largely saturated by water, its uppermost layer consists of a thick, hard crust of salt, easily capable of supporting the weight of a car. Large areas of the surface are covered by water during the rainy season between December and April, but even then it's rarely to a depth of more than 1m, and usually much less. Driving across the perfectly flat white expanse of the Salar, with the unbroken chains of snowcapped mountains lining the far horizon, it's easy to believe you're on another planet, so harsh and inhospitable is the terrain. When dry, the dazzling salt surface shines with such intense whiteness that you'll find yourself reaching down to check that it's not ice or snow, whilst by night the entire landscape is illuminated by the eerie white glow of moonlight reflected in the salt. When it's covered in water after rain, the Salar is turned into an enormous mirror that reflects the surrounding mountain peaks and the sky so perfectly that at times the horizon disappears and the mountains appear like islands floating in the sky.

No less strange are the tenacious **ecosystems** that survive around the arid and salty margins of the Salar, including colonies of cacti and other hardy plants, the rabbit-like viscachas that live on the islands in the centre of the lake, and the flamingos that feed and nest here during the rainy season. Equally hardy are the isolated communities of Aymara and Quechua campesinos who eke out a marginal existence on the shores of the Salar, cultivating quinua in the brackish soils and scraping up salt for sale or exchange.

The southwesternmost corner of Bolivia is covered by the **Reserva de Fauna Andina Eduardo Avaroa**, a 7147-square-kilometre wildlife reserve, ranging between 4000m and 6000m in altitude, which encompasses some of

▲ Relaxing at the hot springs in the Reserva Eduardo Avaroa


THE FAR SOUTHWEST
Oruro
Potosí
Tupiza & Villazón
Antofagasta
San Pedro de Atacama
Salar de Coipasa
Volcán Thunupa (5435m)
Salar de Uyuni
Isla Pescado
Hotel de Sal Playa Blanca
Colchani
Uyuni
Colcha K
San Juan
Salar de Chiguana
Chiguana
San Cristobal
Villa Alota
N
Volcán Ollagüe (5865m)
Laguna Hediona
Laguna Cañapa
Laguna Chiar Khota
Laguna Ramaditas
PAMPA SILOLI
Arbol de Piedra
Laguna Colorada
Sol de Mañana
Cerro Uturuncu (6006m)
Laguna Polques
Salar de Chalviri
RESERVA DE FAUNA ANDINA EDUARDO AVAROA
Volcán Licancabur (5868m)
Laguna Verde
CHILE
ARGENTINA
0
50 km

the most startling scenery in Bolivia. Like the Salar de Uyuni, the desolate landscapes of this remote region possess a surreal, otherworldly beauty. This is a land of glacial salt lakes whose icy waters are stained bright red or emerald green by microorganisms or mineral deposits; of snowcapped volcanic peaks and frozen, high-altitude deserts; of rock outcrops scoured by the unremitting wind into strange, Dalí-esque formations.

As the name of the reserve suggests, this unforgiving environment supports a wide range of rare **Andean wildlife**, including many species that are rarely seen elsewhere. The algae-rich salt lakes support large colonies of all three South American species of flamingo, including the world's largest population of the rare James flamingo, one of the eighty different bird species found in the reserve. You're almost certain to see large herds of vicuña grazing on the scant vegetation of the high, semi-desert grasslands. Rabbit-like viscachas and even the elusive Andean fox are also frequently spotted.

Visiting the Salar and the Reserve

Given their remoteness, really the only way to visit the Salar de Uyuni and Reserva Eduardo Avaroa is on an **organized tour**, which can be easily arranged from Uyuni – you'll usually be able to find space on a tour leaving the next day. Even if you have your own 4WD complete with supplies and navigational aids, you should be very cautious about venturing onto the Salar. It's easy to get lost in the uniform white landscape, while the hard crust on the surface can give way under the weight of vehicles and the consequences of breakdown can be grave. In 2001 a truck carrying a local family home from Uyuni to their village on the other side of the Salar broke down. The passengers tried to walk out but got caught on the Salar after dark; all five froze to death. The Reserva Eduardo Avaroa is equally difficult to visit independently; with a population of only a few hundred people living in isolated llama-herding settlements and mining camps, this remote wilderness has no real roads.

In Uyuni, avenidas Arce, Ferroviaria and Potosí are lined with some forty **tour agencies**, all of which run combined trips to the Salar and the reserve. Some companies run one-day bus excursions out to the Isla de Pescado on the Salar for $20 per person, but if you've come this far it would be crazy not to go for the full circuit. The **standard trip** is a four-day tour by 4WD around a circuit comprising the Salar de Uyuni and Lagunas Colorada and Verde in the reserve. Choosing an agency can be a bit random: all offer pretty much identical tours, but all are prone to the same problems; late departures, dangerous drivers, insufficient food, inadequate accommodation and vehicle breakdowns are all possibilities no matter which agency you go with. A visit to the iRanking information office on Potosí (attached to the café of the same name) can be extremely helpful as they maintain a detailed database of up-to-the-minute tourist reviews of all the agencies and will recommend individual agencies based on the particular criteria you select. An equally good resource is travellers that have just returned from a tour. Despite all the hassles and potential pitfalls, however, these tours are well worth the trouble, and almost everyone who goes counts them amongst their best experiences in Bolivia.

The **cost** of the standard four-day tour varies between $80 and $110 per person, depending on the time of year. You'll get charged more in peak season (June–Aug) and when the Salar is partly covered in water during the rainy season (Dec–April), since the salt water damages the vehicles – it can sometimes get so deep that parts of the Salar west of the Isla de Pescado become impassable, in which case tours are often rerouted to return to Uyuni from the Salar before going down to Lagunas Colorado and Verde. The agencies all tend to charge about the same price, though if you turn up with a group already formed you may be able to talk your way into a discount. Even if you're travelling alone, though, you should be able to find a group to go with within hours of arriving in Uyuni. The cost includes food, accommodation, transport and Spanish-speaking guide (an English-speaking guide will cost extra). You also have to pay a $4.50 fee to enter the Reserva Eduardo Avaroa, payable in Uyuni or at the rangers' office at Laguna Colorada. Be sure to get a ticket when you pay, as otherwise your money is unlikely to end up funding wildlife protection, as is intended.

The vehicles – almost all of which are Toyota Landcruisers – have room for six or seven passengers plus the driver; if they take seven you should pay a little less. **Accommodation** is in very basic huts or refuges, either on rough bunks or on mats on the floor. **Food** on the trips is usually little more than adequate, so it's worth taking along some extra supplies like chocolate, biscuits and fruit – and maybe a little *singani* to chase away the cold. Bear in mind that this is a wilderness adventure over hundreds of kilometres of very rugged terrain, so that even with the best-maintained vehicle mechanical failures and breakdowns are likely. Drivers from different companies usually help each other out to make sure everyone gets back to Uyuni safely, but don't be too surprised if your four-day trip turns into a six-day odyssey.

Even compared to the rest of the Altiplano, the Reserva Eduardo Avaroa and, especially, the Salar de Uyuni can be extremely **cold**. Though by day the sun can take temperatures as high as 30°C, the high altitude and reflective surface of the Salar mean that little heat is retained, so by night temperatures can drop below –25°C, and as far as –40°C when the wind-chill factor is included – one of the widest day–night temperature fluctuations anywhere in the world. Take a good sleeping bag (most agencies will rent you one for the trip for $5) to supplement the blankets which are usually available in the refuges, a warm hat, gloves, a windproof jacket and several layers of clothing including a fleece or woollen jumper and, ideally, thermal underwear. You should also take sun block and sunglasses to counter the fierce glare – snow blindness is a real possibility here.

Uyuni to Colcha K

Tours invariably enter the Salar via **COLCHANI**, a salt-processing village on its eastern shores about 20km north of Uyuni. Here you can see the way locals extract salt, scraping it off the ground into small mounds which are carried off on bicycles or in wheelbarrows for processing. The salt is then dried and has iodine added before being packaged – a legal requirement, as iodine deficiency leads to cretinism and goitre, two ailments once common amongst people who consumed untreated salt from the Salar. Until relatively recently, communities like Colchani exploited the salt primarily as a resource to exchange with other indigenous communities. Every year dozens of pack llamas would set off carrying salt as far away as the department of Tarija, returning with maize, coca and other goods not produced in the Altiplano, though such caravans are a rarity now, and have largely been replaced by trucks. Greyish blocks of salt cut straight from the surface of the Salar are also used as salt licks for cattle, while some villagers carve the salt into ashtrays and other souvenirs which you can buy.

A few kilometres west of Colchani is the last remaining **salt hotel**, **the Hotel de Sal Playa Blanca**, built from greyish blocks of raw salt cut from the surface of the Salar; it's worth having a look round for the novelty value. It used to be possible to spend the night but this has recently been curtailed due to well-founded environmental concerns – indeed, there is talk of removing the hotel entirely. Surrounding the hotel are several holes in the Salar where water bubbles up from beneath the hard surface crust. Known as **ojos de sal** – salt eyes – these holes are a good place to find beautiful, newly formed salt crystals.

Isla de Pescado

From the salt hotel all tours head 60km or so west across the Salar to the **Isla de Pescado** (Fish Island), one of several small islands in the Salar, more properly known by the traditional name of Inca Wasi – "Inca House" in Quechua. From its peak, a short sharp climb up from the shore on a well-marked trail, the views across the immense white expanse of the Salar are unforgettable. To the north is a series of snowcapped peaks, including the imperious cone of Thunupa, the extinct volcano that is the most powerful *achachila*, or mountain god, in the region. To the west you can just make out a straight line like an old agricultural terrace running along the mountainside that rises from the shore: this is the ancient shoreline of Lago Tauca, 70m above the surface of the Salar. On the island itself, the rocks are covered in **fossilized algae**, another reminder of the prehistoric waters that once covered the entire area.

Marooned in the centre of a lifeless desert of salt, the island manages to support a delicate but extremely tenacious ecosystem despite the harsh climate, low rainfall and thin, brackish soil. Its entire surface is covered by **giant cacti**, some of which are more than 10m tall and thought to be hundreds of years old. In January and February the cacti produce bright white flowers which attract large

The Salar de Uyuni in history and legend

According to geologists, the Salar de Uyuni occupies what was once the deepest part of an enormous lake, known as **Lago Tauca**, which covered the southern Altiplano until 12,000 years ago. Reaching depths of up to 70m, Lago Tauca existed for a thousand years and covered the area now occupied by Lago Poopó, the Salar de Coipasa and the Salar de Uyuni – and was itself the successor to an earlier lake, Lago Minchín, which covered the same area to an even greater depth up until 25,000 years ago. The Salar was formed when the last waters of Lago Tauca evaporated, leaving behind salt that had been washed into the lake after being leached by rain from the surrounding mountains, where it had been deposited millions of years ago before the Andes were formed, when what is now Bolivia was beneath the ocean.

Studies of the lake have found that the **salt** extends to depths of up to 120m, packed in layers sandwiched between sedimentary deposits. The top layer, which is about 6m thick, was laid down by the final evaporation of Lago Tauca. In the dry season, the surface of the Salar, up to a depth of 10–20cm, becomes extremely hard and dry. Beneath this crust, though, the salt remains saturated with water. As the top layer dries, it contracts, forming cracks which draw the underlying salt water up by capillary action, thereby forming the strange polygonal lines of raised salt that cover the Salar in the dry season. As well as salt, the Salar is also home to the world's largest deposit of **lithium**, a mineral with a growing number of industrial applications. So far, this has not been exploited, but there are fears that future mining could have disastrous consequences for the fragile ecosystems surrounding the Salar and for the communities that live there.

For the campesinos who live on the shores of the lake, explanations of the Salar's origin are rather different. Legend has it that the mountain goddess **Yana Pollera** – the nearest peak to Uyuni – was amorously involved with both Thunupa, the volcano that rises imperiously on the north shore of the Salar, and a second volcano named Q'osqo. When she gave birth to a child, named Kalikatin, the two male volcanoes fought bitterly over who was the father. Worried for the child's safety, Yana Pollera sent it far away to the west. Then, concerned that her child would not survive alone, she flooded the plain between them with her milk so it could feed. Eventually the milk turned to salt, and the lake – traditionally known as the **Salar de Thunupa** – came into being.

numbers of giant hummingbirds to the island from across the Salar, while in March and April they bear an edible fruit called *pasakana* which was until recently harvested by local campesinos. The trunks of these giant cacti are about the only locally available source of wood, and you can see their distinctively pockmarked timber in doors and roofs in villages all around the Salar.

The island gets pretty busy during the June to September high season, with over a dozen different tour groups sometimes visiting on the same day. During the rainy season this part of the Salar is sometimes too deeply flooded to be crossed by car, in which case tours return to Uyuni before continuing down to the Reserva Eduardo Avaroa along the normal return route via San Cristobal. When it's dry enough, though, they head straight down from Isla de Pescado via Colcha K – this route is described in the following section on the Reserva Eduardo Avaroa.

South from the Salar de Uyuni

From Colcha K, just south of the Salar de Uyuni, it's a 160-kilometre drive down to the **entrance** to the reserve. En route you cross the edge of the smaller Salar de Chiguana and the railway line that runs from Uyuni to the Chilean border – there's also a forlorn military outpost where you may have to show your passport. The rough track then climbs above 4000m and runs past a series of snow-frosted volcanoes straddling the border. One of these, the 5865-metre **Ollagüe**, is Bolivia's only active volcano, and you can usually make out thin plumes of smoke rising from just below its peak – if you have an extra day available and arrange in advance with your tour operator, you can actually drive to the summit. The track south runs through a series of ancient lava fields, with eroded red rock interspersed with stretches of grey dust strewn with black volcanic rocks from past eruptions. It then passes a series of four brackish, blue-white lakes – Cañapa, Hedionda, Ramaditas and Chiar Khota – surrounded by snowy peaks. All four lakes support large colonies of **flamingos** as well as other water birds like ducks and wallata geese, and you're also likely to see herds of vicuña nearby.

The track then climbs still higher to over 4500m and across the **Pampa Siloli**, a high-altitude desert of volcanic ash and gravel scattered with rock outcrops that have been sandblasted into surreal shapes by the constant, howling winds. The strangest of these is the **Arbol de Piedra** (Stone Tree), a massive boulder 8m high that balances on a narrow stem. Even the hardy Andean grasses struggle to survive in this harsh desert environment, but amongst the rock outcroppings you may catch a glimpse of a viscacha or an Andean fox – both are encouraged to provide photo opportunities by passing tour drivers, who leave food for them.

Laguna Colorada to Laguna Verde

Shortly afterwards the track enters the Reserva Eduardo Avaroa and drops down to the extraordinary blood-red waters of **Laguna Colorada**, the biggest lake in the reserve. The lake owes its bizarre red colour, which changes in intensity during the day, to the natural pigments of the algae that live in its shallow, mineral-laden water – were it not for the presence of the flamingos and other water birds, it would be easy to think the lake's hue was the result of some mining accident, so unnatural is its appearance. These algae are also a rich source of food for flamingos, all three species of which nest here in large numbers – the lake is thought to be the single biggest nesting site of the rare James flamingo in the world. The fringes of the lake are encrusted with bright white deposits of ice and borax, a mineral used in paint, acid and glass manufacture. The **park office**, where you have to pay the $4.50 entrance fee, is beside the lake, and there are several basic huts and refuges where almost all tour groups spend the night. Be warned that it gets bitterly cold here, with temperatures often dropping below –20°C.

You need to set off before dawn the next morning in sub-zero temperatures to enjoy the full spectacle of the **Sol de Mañana geyser**. Set at an altitude of 5000m amid boiling pools of mud and sulphur, the geyser's high-pressure jet of steam shoots out from the earth to a great height, but diminishes in power once the air temperature rises later in the day. After the geyser the trail drops down to **Laguna Polques**, which has a series of **hot springs** on its southern shore. No matter how cold you may feel, don't miss out on the chance to bathe here – the deliciously warm waters are the perfect antidote to the high-altitude chill.

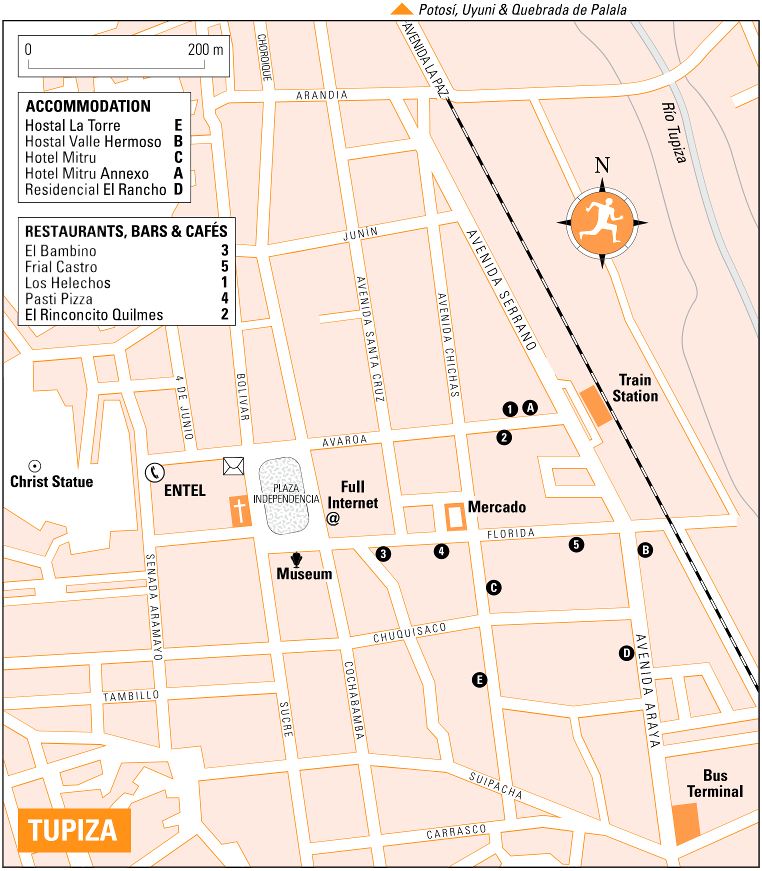
The next stop, about 30km further on, is **Laguna Verde**, a striking green lake set at over 4300m in the southeasternmost corner of the reserve – and, indeed, of Bolivia. Covering about seventeen square kilometres and divided into two sections by a narrow causeway, the lake owes its dramatic green hues to the arsenic and other minerals which are suspended in its waters – the lake's colour ranges from turquoise to deep emerald depending on how much the wind stirs up its sediments. Above the lake rises the perfect snow-covered cone of **Volcán Licancabur**, a 5868-metre dormant volcano straddling the border with Chile, on the peak of which archeologists recently discovered the ruins of an Inca ceremonial site.

There's a small **refuge** beside the lake where you can spend the night, though most groups press on from here. You can cross into **Chile** at the manned border post about 7km away – it's usually possible to get an exit stamp here, though you'd be strongly advised to get one in advance in Uyuni. If you want to continue into Chile you should let the tour company you're travelling with know before leaving Uyuni, as they should be able to arrange onward transport to **San Pedro de Atacama**, 35km away, which otherwise may be hard to come by.

From Laguna Verde, tours make the 360-kilometre or so return trip to Uyuni by a more easterly route, stopping overnight at one of the few scattered llama-herding hamlets or mining camps along the way. The route follows the course of the Río de Lípez, passing through desolate high-Andean scenery which is rarely anything less than spectacular. As you head out of the reserve look out for good views of Laguna Colorada below you in the distance to the west, and for the white peak of the highest mountain in the region, the 6006-metre **Cerro Uturuncu**, to the east.

Tupiza and around

Some 200km southwest of Uyuni, the isolated mining town of **TUPIZA** nestles in a narrow, fertile valley that cuts through the harsh desert landscape of the Cordillera de Chichas. Sheltered from the bitter winds of the Altiplano by the jagged mountains that rise steeply on either side of the valley, the town enjoys a comparatively warm climate, while its several thousand friendly and laid-back inhabitants are helping to make it an increasingly popular stop for travellers passing through southern Bolivia. The real attraction, though, is the dramatic **desert scenery** that surrounds Tupiza, a landscape of red, eroded rock formations, cactus-strewn mountains and deep canyons that is ideal for hiking, horse-riding or just touring in a jeep.


Potosí, Uyuni & Quebrada de Palala
0 200 m
ACCOMMODATION
Hostal La Torre E
Hostal Valle Hermoso B
Hotel Mitru C
Hotel Mitru Annexo A
Residencial El Rancho D
RESTAURANTS, BARS & CAFÉS
El Bambino 3
Frial Castro 5
Los Helechos 1
Pasti Pizza 4
El Rinconcito Quilmes 2
CHOROIQUE
ARANDIA
AVENIDA LA PAZ
Río Tupiza
N
JUNÍN
AVENIDA SANTA CRUZ
AVENIDA CHICHAS
AVENIDA SERRANO
4 DE JUNIO
BOLIVAR
Train Station
AVAROA
Christ Statue
ENTEL
PLAZA INDEPENDENCIA
Full Internet
Mercado
FLORIDA
El Cañon
Museum
SENADA ARAMAYO
CHUQUISACO
AVENIDA ARAYA
COCHABAMBA
TAMBILLO
SUCRE
Quebrada de Palmira
Villazón
SUIPACHA
Bus Terminal
CARRASCO
TUPIZA

All these activities are easy to arrange in the town, a peaceful and friendly place where a fledgling but well-organized tourist industry has sprung up to cater to the growing number of foreign visitors.

Tupiza was originally founded in 1535 by the conquistador Diego de Almagro, who passed through here at the head of the first Spanish expedition to penetrate into the southern Andes. For most of its history the town's economy has been dominated by mining operations in the surrounding mountains, where silver, lead, tin, antimony and bismuth were once found in abundance. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries this was the home base of Carlos Aramayo, one of the biggest mining barons in Bolivia, and the mine payrolls were rich enough to attract the attentions of the infamous North American gunslingers **Butch Cassidy** and the **Sundance Kid** (see p.236), who are believed to have died in a shoot-out in the town of San Vicente, some 100km to the northwest. Today, though, the mineral deposits are largely exhausted or simply no longer worth mining due to declining metal prices, and Tupiza's economy depends more on its role as a market centre for the agricultural communities of the surrounding region and, increasingly, on tourism.

Arrival and information

Tupiza is a small town and it's easy to find your way around. The **bus terminal** (Ⓣ0694/2501) is on Avenida Araya, three blocks south and two blocks east of the main square, Plaza Independencia. The **train station** (Ⓣ0694/2527) is three blocks east of the main plaza on Avenida Serrudo. **Taxis** wait for arriving passengers at both locations, but everything is so close that you may as well walk. There's no formal **tourist information** office in the town, but the two main tour operators – Tupiza Tours, inside the *Hotel Mitru* on Avenida Chichas, and Valle Hermoso tours, in the hotel of the same name – can tell you all you need to know, though obviously with a view to selling you some kind of trip.

Several cambios east of the plaza on Calle Avaroa will change **traveller's cheques**, as well as US dollars and Argentine pesos. Tupiza Tours, inside the *Hotel Mitru*, and the *Hostal Valle Hermoso* also change US dollars, Argentine pesos and traveller's cheques, and may also give cash advances on credit cards. There's **Internet access** at Full Internet on the plaza, among others – all excruciatingly slow. The **post office** is just west of Plaza Independencia on Avaroa, while the **ENTEL** office is on the corner of Calle Avaroa and Avenida Aramayo, a block west of the plaza.

Accommodation

There's only a small range of **accommodation** in Tupiza, all of it inexpensive and relatively simple, and aimed specifically at backpackers on limited budgets. Nearly all the places listed are under the management of the *Hotel Mitru* or *Valle Hermosa* chains, which control much of Tupiza's incipient tourism boom, but they do a good job of meeting travellers' needs.

Organized tours from Tupiza

Tupiza's **tour agencies** all offer broadly similar guided excursions into the desert landscapes around the town in 4WDs or on horseback or mountain bike, as well as longer trips to **San Vicente** (see p.237), where Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid are thought to have died, and **Huaca Huañusca** (see p.237), where they committed their final robbery. Horse-riding trips cost a uniform $2.50 per person per hour, including mount and guide. Jeep excursions cost about $70 per day for a vehicle seating up to six, while a long day-trip to San Vicente should cost about $100 per vehicle – it's rarely a problem finding people to go with. Tupiza's agencies can also organize trips to the **Reserva de Fauna Andina Eduardo Avaroa** and the **Salar de Uyuni**, entering the reserve via the remote Sur Lípez region, heading north into the Salar and then either dropping you off in Uyuni or returning to Tupiza along the main road. This route is arguably more aesthetically pleasing than the traditional circuit leaving from Uyuni as the scenery builds in interest each day and no backtracking is required – though a rapid ascent to 5000m the second day can be a bit challenging. This four-day circuit should cost about $120 per person in a jeep with at least four passengers.

Tupiza Tours Av Chichas 187, inside the *Hotel Mitru* Ⓣ02/6943001, Ⓦwww.tupizatours.com. The oldest and biggest operator in Tupiza, they have one of the better reputations for Reserva and Salar tours. They also run regular and highly efficient jeep, horse-riding, and mountain-bike excursions as well as longer trips, including a two-day jeep tour following the last steps of Butch and Sundance to Huaca Huañusca and San Vicente.

Valle Hermoso Tours Av Pedro Araya, in the *Hostal Valle Hermoso* Ⓣ02/6942370, Ⓕ02/6942592, Ⓦwww.bolivia.freehosting.net. Offers the same local horseback and jeep tours as well as longer horseback camping trips (1–4 days).

Hostal Valle Hermoso Av Pedro Araya 478 ⓣ02/6942370, ⓕ02/6942592, ⓦwww.bolivia.freehosting.net. Welcoming and helpful establishment, with recently refurbished, clean and sunny rooms, with or without bath. There's also a comfortable common room with TV, and a rooftop terrace, and breakfast and laundry service are available. They also have an overflow facility a block closer to the bus station – its only disadvantage is the need to walk back to the original facility for some services. ②–③

Hotel Mitru Av Chichas 187 ⓣ02/6943001, ⓦwww.tupizatours.com. This friendly place has clean, simple rooms with or without bath, set around a sunny central courtyard and pool – its popularity makes it a good place to organize groups for tours. Breakfast included. ②–③

Hotel Mitru Annexo Av Avaroa and Chichas ⓣ02/6943002. Just around the corner from the original Hotel Mitru, with the same facilities and welcoming atmosphere. ②–③

Hotel La Torre Av Chichas and Chuquisaca ⓣ02/6942633. An emerging rival to the more established operators, with cosy rooms with or without bath, and nice big beds. Breakfast included. ②–③

Residencial El Rancho Av Pedro Araya 86 ⓣ02/6943116. Basic but good value, with clean, spacious rooms with bath, plus laundry facilities. ①

The Town

Though it's a pleasant place to hang out, Tupiza has little in the way of conventional tourist attractions. The main square, the **Plaza de Independencia**, is filled with tall palm trees under which people sit to warm themselves in the morning sun whilst reading yesterday's newspapers. At its centre stands a statue of José Avelino Aramayo, founder of the great mining dynasty of the same name that was based in Tupiza and long dominated its economy. As in most Bolivian mining towns, the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century civic architecture around the square reflects a past age of prosperity now long gone. The unexceptional Neoclassical church, with two ornate bell towers, on the west side was built in 1897. There's a **museum** of sorts behind the town hall just south of the plaza on Calle Sucre, but if you want to see the limited collection of historic photographs and archeological finds you'll have to ask in the town hall for someone to let you in, as there are no regular opening hours. The hillside to the west is topped by a **statue of Christ**, from where there are good views over the town's tin rooftops and the narrow valley of the Río Tupiza; to reach the statue just walk a few minutes west of the plaza along Avaroa, then follow the Stations of the Cross up the hill. Another good walk near the town is up the unimaginatively named **El Cañon**, a deep, narrow canyon lined with spectacularly eroded rock pinnacles. Walk out of town to the west, past the church, and follow the

Moving on from Tupiza

All routes out of Tupiza pass through some fairly spectacular landscapes, so if you can you should time your departure so you travel in daylight. Several **buses** leave every morning and evening for **Potosí**, eight hours away, from where there are connections to Oruro, La Paz and Sucre; there's also usually a direct overnight bus to La Paz each evening. Buses make the three-hour trip to **Villazón** several times a day, and there are usually three buses daily to **Tarija** (8hr), departing in the evening; if you want to travel this beautiful route by day, take an early-morning bus to Villazón and pick up an onward connection from there. Buses make the scenic nine-hour journey to **Uyuni** on Mondays and Thursdays at 11am, and micros leave daily around 10am and make the trip in half the time.

You can also travel north to Uyuni and Oruro and south to Villazón by **train**, which is an altogether more comfortable experience. See p.248 for full details.

road as it curves round behind the hill with the Christ statue. From here, turn up the (usually) dry river bed that climbs into the mountains on your left – the canyon gets deeper and narrower as you climb. In all it's a two-hour walk there and back.

Eating and drinking

There's only a small choice of places **to eat and drink** in Tupiza. As usual, the cheapest place for food is at the **market**, on the first floor of the corner of calles Chichas and Florida, where you'll find fruit juices, inexpensive soups and meals. Alternatively, there are a few restaurants where you can find good-value set *almuerzos* and the usual Bolivian meat-based main courses, as well as a growing number of dishes aimed at travellers, like pizza and pasta. Local specialities include *asado de cordero* (roast lamb), usually served on weekends, and *cangrejitos*, soft-shelled freshwater crabs fried with onions.

El Bambino Florida and Santa Cruz. Busy little restaurant just off the plaza serving good *salteñas* and other snacks in the morning, a reasonable set *almuerzo*, and pizza and meat and chicken dishes in the evening.

Frial Castro Florida and Araya. Primarily a sundry shop, but it also prepares tasty and reasonably priced meals, including spaghetti and lasagne. Good for vegetarians.

Los Helechos Av Avaroa and Chichas. Popular travellers' hang-out serving all the gringo favourites at gringo prices, from fruit salads and American breakfasts in the morning to pizza, pasta and chicken.

Pastipizza Florida and Chichas. The most charming of the many pizza and pasta places along Avenida Florida; also serves a relatively wide variety of breakfasts.

El Rinconcito Quilmes Avaroa and Chichas. The best food in town, popular with locals for its filling set *almuerzos* ($1), excellent meat dishes (including delicious Argentine-style steaks; $2), and special lamb roasts at the weekend. There's indoor and outdoor seating, and live music on Sunday afternoons.

Around Tupiza

Around Tupiza stretches the harsh but beautiful **Cordillera de Chichas**, a striking landscape of cactus-strewn badlands, deep gulches and canyons, and strangely shaped rock formations and pinnacles. The easiest way to see the cordillera is to take a jeep excursion with one of Tupiza's tour companies (see p.233), but travelling on foot or horseback offers a much more relaxed way to explore the eerie desert landscapes and enjoy the tranquillity and ever-changing colours of the mountains, as well as offering the chance to indulge any Wild West outlaw fantasies you may harbour. Take plenty of water with you, though, particularly if you're on foot, as the sun can be very intense in these enclosed canyons, and water is scarce. There are plenty of good spots to camp in the cordillera's secluded valleys, but avoid pitching your tent on river beds in case of flash floods after rain.

A few kilometres northwest of Tupiza along the road to Uyuni is the mouth of the **Quebrada de Palala**, a ravine formed by a tributary of the Río Tupiza. The river bed is dry for most of the year, and is used as a highway by vehicles heading to isolated mines up in the wilderness to the northwest. If you drive, ride or walk 6km or so up the gorge you'll come to a series of red rock formations that have been eroded into massive fins. A few kilometres further on you'll reach a high saddle between two peaks known as **El Sillar**, around which stands a stone forest of tall pinnacles of eroded rock.

A few kilometres southwest of Tupiza, the **Quebrada de Palmira** is another deep, cactus-strewn ravine gouged out of the red mountains by a seasonal river, with dramatic rock formations on either side. If you walk, ride or drive about

The last days of Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid

The wilds of Bolivia have always attracted their fair share of renegades and desperadoes, but few have received as much posthumous attention as the North American outlaws **Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid**. Made famous by the 1969 Hollywood movie starring Paul Newman and Robert Redford, they belonged to a band of outlaws – known variously as the Hole-in-the-Wall Gang, the Train Robbers' Syndicate and the Wild Bunch – who robbed banks, trains and mines in the Rocky Mountains. In 1901, with the golden age of Wild West gunslingers coming to an end, a price on their heads and the ruthless Pinkerton Detective Agency (the predecessor of the FBI) hot on their trail, Butch and Sundance fled the US by ship to South America.

They settled in Argentina under assumed names, living on a ranch in the Cholilla Valley in Patagonia, where they raised sheep, cattle and horses. But the Pinkerton Agency had not given up the hunt, and in 1905 the two outlaws went on the run after their names were linked with a bank robbery in Río Gallegos, in the far south of Argentina. They fled to Chile, apparently returning to Argentina to rob another bank before showing up in Bolivia in 1906, where they found work at the Concordia Tin Mine – their duties, ironically, included guarding the payroll. A year later they made a trip to Santa Cruz, and Butch returned determined to start life again as a rancher in the Eastern Lowlands. Perhaps in need of capital to finance their retirement, in 1908 they quit their jobs and returned to their old ways, heading to **Tupiza**, where the wealth of the Aramayo mining company offered a tempting prize. Put off from robbing the town bank by the presence of Bolivian troops, on November 3 Butch and Sundance intercepted a convoy of mules carrying a mine payroll at **Huaca Huañusca**, a mountain pass north of Tupiza. Finding only $90,000 rather than the half million they had been led to expect, the outlaws fled south with the loot loaded onto an Aramayo company mule. The alarm was quickly raised against them, however. With military patrols and posses of angry miners (whose pay had been stolen) scouring the countryside, and the Argentine and Chilean border guards alerted by telegram, the bandits stopped at the home of an English friend, the mining engineer A. G. Francis. Francis later reported that Sundance told him of the hold-up, but insisted "he had never hurt or killed a man except in self-defence, and had never stolen from the poor, but only from rich corporations well able to support his requisitions".

Warned that the authorities were on their trail, Butch and Sundance turned north, heading towards Uyuni. On November 6 they stopped for the night in **San Vicente**, a remote mining village about 100km northwest of Tupiza. Unknown to them, however, a four-man military patrol was also spending the night in the village. Informed of the outlaws' presence, they attacked the room where Butch and Sundance were staying. After a brief shoot-out, all went quiet. In the morning, the two bandits were found dead, Butch having apparently shot his wounded partner before turning his gun on himself. The bodies were buried in an unmarked grave in the cemetery. Or were they? In subsequent decades repeated rumours suggested that the two dead men were not Butch and Sundance. The two outlaws were reported to have returned to the US or to Argentina having assumed new identities; one report even had them finally gunned down in Paris. In 1991 forensic anthropologists exhumed a body from the San Vicente cemetery, but were unable to settle the mystery surrounding the outlaws' fate.

6km along the *quebrada* you'll reach the **Puerta del Diablo** (Devil's Gate), a gateway formed by two great vertical slabs which look as if they have been deliberately placed there by massive, unseen hands. A few kilometres further along is the **Valle de Los Machos**, a stone forest of rock pinnacles eroded into distinctly phallic shapes. The ravine eventually peters out into a narrow canyon with steep blood-red walls known as the **Canyon del Inca**.

About 10km south of Tupiza, **Quebrada Seca** is another deep and usually dry ravine with dramatic, eroded rock formations. Here, soft conglomerate rock has been worn by wind and seasonal rain into a series of spires, pinnacles and even arches, giving the sides of the valley the appearance of a Gothic cathedral. A few kilometres east of Quebrada Seca, also about 10km south of town, the road and railway to Villazón pass through a narrow defile known as **La Angostura**, where the Río Tupiza has cut a deep gorge through a narrow opening – it's usually included in day-long jeep tours of the region around Tupiza, though it isn't worth making a special journey to see on its own.

San Vicente and Huaca Huañusca

Tour agencies in Tupiza run two-day trips following the trail of the infamous US outlaws, **Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid**, to Huaca Huañusca and San Vicente, the sites of their final robbery and deaths – though there's actually almost nothing related to the gunslingers to see at either site. Located some 100km northwest of Tupiza at an altitude of over 4300m, the bleak mining village of **SAN VICENTE**, where Butch and Sundance are believed to have died in a shoot-out, is pretty much abandoned. Locals can show you the adobe hut where the outlaws made their last stand – against four Bolivian soldiers rather than the entire regiment shown in the film – and you can also see the grave in the cemetery where they are thought to have been buried. Apart from that, though, there's not much else to look at in this virtual ghost town apart from abandoned tin-roofed mining shacks. There's even less to see at **HUACA HUAÑUSCA**, the mountain pass about 45km north of Tupiza where Butch and Sundance made their last robbery. There's not really much point visiting these places unless you have a real interest in the two dead outlaws. Having said that, quite a few travellers obviously do, and it's usually possible to get a group together for a tour within a day or two.

Villazón and the Argentine border

About 92km south of Tupiza by road or rail, the dusty, ramshackle frontier town of **VILLAZÓN** is the main border crossing between Bolivia and Argentina. Set at an altitude of 3445m, it's a busy little place which bustles with cross-border traffic, though a recent crackdown on smuggling and the economic downturn in Argentina has somewhat reduced the flow of goods and people. Most of the people crossing the border here are Bolivian migrants who live and work in Argentina – there are over a million Bolivians in the far richer neighbouring country, though economic slowdown and growing hostility towards migrants means that Buenos Aires doesn't exert the same attraction it did up until the mid-1990s. Unless you get stuck in Villazón overnight, there's really no reason to linger; you're better off pushing on into Bolivia or crossing into Argentina.

Practicalities

The **train station** is about 400m north of the central plaza on Avenida República de Argentina, the main road out of town. The **bus terminal** is just north of the plaza on the same road. From the plaza, Avenida Internacional runs

Moving on from Villazón

The best way to travel north from Villazón is by **train** – see p.248 for full details of trains and schedules. Tickets go on sale 24 hours before departure, but there are usually seats available right up until departure unless it's a public-holiday period, when trains fill up with Bolivians returning from Argentina. Alternatively, several **buses** leave daily for Potosí (around 12hr), from where there are connections to La Paz, Sucre, Oruro and Cochabamba. There are also several departures throughout the day to Tupiza (3hr). One or two buses a day make the scenic eight-hour journey west to Tarija, either departing early in the morning or travelling overnight.

Crossing the Argentine border

Crossing the border couldn't be easier. Just walk south from the plaza down to the frontier along Avenida Internacional and get an exit stamp at the Bolivian *migración* office (daily 6am–8pm), then walk across the bridge into Argentina, where immigration is open 24 hours a day. From the Argentine border town of **La Quiaca** there are regular buses to the city of Jujuy, from where there are connections to the rest of the country. Accommodation and food in La Quiaca are much better than in Villazón, but cost a bit more.

down to the frontier a few hundred metres to the south, lined with shops filled with cheap and rather shoddy consumer goods to sell to cross-border shoppers and Bolivian migrants heading down to Argentina. There are also several **cambios** where you can change dollars and Argentine pesos; some also change traveller's cheques, though only for a steep commission. If you're heading into Argentina, it's best to get rid of your Bolivian pesos before you cross the border. The **ENTEL** office is two blocks north of the plaza on Avenida República de Argentina, and there are several phone booths around town. There's an **Internet** café opposite the bus terminal.

The best **place to stay** in Villazón is the clean and comfortable *Hotel Plaza* (Ⓣ02/5963535, Ⓕ02/5962026; ②–③), on the main square, which has cheap rooms with shared bathroom and slightly more expensive ones with private bath and cable TV. A cheaper alternative is the simpler *Residencial Martinez* (Ⓣ02/5963353; ②), behind the bus terminal, or one of the basic places on Avenida República de Argentina like the *Residencial Mirador* (Ⓣ02/5962492; ②) or the good-value *Residencial Salvador* (no phone; ②).

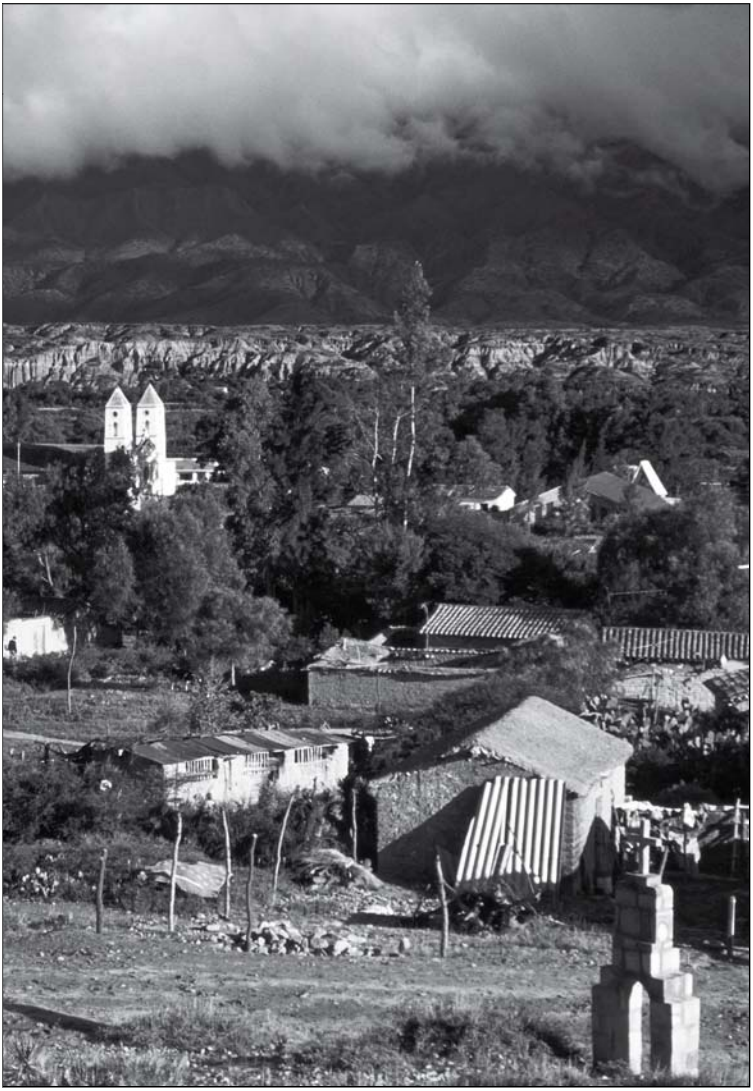
The best **place to eat** is the rather expensive *Chifa Jardin*, which serves decent Chinese food 24 hours a day. Also good is the *Charquekan*, behind the bus terminal, where you can find filling set *almuerzos* and *cenas* as well as reasonably priced meat and chicken dishes. Otherwise, there are plenty of **food stalls** around the bus terminal and inside the covered market on the east side of the plaza, and a number of cheap fried-chicken restaurants on the way down to the border along Avenida Internacional.

Tarija and around

In the far south of the country, hemmed in by the high Altiplano to the west and by the cactus-choked hills that drop down into the impenetrable forests of the Chaco to the east, the isolated city of **TARIJA** is in many ways a world apart from the rest of Bolivia. Set in a broad, fertile valley at an altitude of 1924m, the city lies at the centre of a rich agricultural region known as the

Andalucía of Bolivia on account of its sunny climate, vineyard-filled valley and the arid mountain scenery that surrounds it. Indeed, so striking are the similarities with southern Spain that Luis de Fuentes, the conquistador who founded the city, named the river on whose banks it sits the Guadalquivir, after the river that flows past Seville.

Tarija is also famous for its **wine** production, and the valley's rich soils and fecund climate attracted large numbers of Andalucían farmers. The peasant culture they brought with them survived in isolation and is still very evident



▲ Tarija

in the traditional costumes of the Tarijeños, in their folkloric dances and religious fiestas, in their love of food and wine, and in their languid, sing-song accents. Known as **Chapacos**, the Tarijeños take considerable pride in their distinct cultural identity. Largely mestizo rather than indigenous, and closer culturally to northern Argentina, they think of themselves as a people apart from the rest of Bolivia, and though the region has provided two presidents in recent decades – including the hugely influential Victor Paz Estenssoro – it otherwise managed to avoid much of the social and political upheaval of the past century.

Tarija was founded on July 4, 1574 as a frontier outpost on the far southeast edge of Alto Peru to guard against incursions by the indomitable **Chiriguano** tribes of the Chaco. The settlement thrived on the valley's rich agricultural produce, exporting wine, cattle and grain to the mines of the Altiplano, but despite its prosperity, Tarija remained on the front line of missionary and military expeditions against the Chiriguanos – only after the final Chiriguano uprising was crushed in 1892 were outlying settlements finally freed from the threat of tribal raiders. The greatest moment in Tarija's history came during the Independence War on April 15, 1817, when a combined force of Argentine troops and Chapaco guerrilla riders led by a one-armed rebel named Eustaquio

Fiestas in Tarija

Tarijeños are known throughout Bolivia for their love of music, dance and a good party, so it's no surprise that the city stages some vibrant annual fiestas. Though not as strongly influenced by pre-Christian rites and indigenous cultures as the fiestas elsewhere in the Bolivian Andes, fiestas in Tarija are still deeply rooted in the agricultural cycle and the calendar of Catholic saints' days. The distinctive Chapaco **folk music** features strongly at all the fiestas, played on unusual woodwind instruments typical of the region like the *erque* and *quenilla*, as well as those imported directly from Spain like the violin and small *tambor* drum. This music is accompanied by poetic and often comic traditional folk songs known as *coplas* – usually sung as duets by a young man and woman. The best known and most colourful of the region's folkloric **dances** is the *Chuncho*, in which dancers wear brightly coloured robes, feathered headdresses and masks in ritual portrayal of the Chiriguano tribes of the Chaco, whose determined resistance to conquest provided a constant menace to Tarijeño settlers until the end of the nineteenth century.

Tarija's **Carnaval** celebrations in February or March are amongst the most colourful in Bolivia. On the Thursday before Carnaval, the Dia de Comadres is marked by an exchange of cakes and other gifts, and by a parade of all the women in the city dressed in their finest traditional attire. Carnaval itself is celebrated with a mass parade of folkloric dances and campesinos in elaborate traditional costumes, and several days of water-fighting, dancing, singing, drinking and eating in the main streets and plazas and in outlying villages. The fiesta ends with the ritual burial of the devil, who's blamed for tempting people into the excesses of Carnaval, accompanied by a host of drunken mourners. The end of Carnaval coincides with the **Fiesta de la Uva** (Grape Festival) in La Concepción, 35km south of the city, where grape-growers show off their wares amid further eating, drinking and folkloric dancing.

On August 15 each year Tarijeños celebrate the fiesta of the **Virgen de la Asunción** with a mass pilgrimage to the village of Chaguaya, 70km south of the city; unusually in Bolivia, this fiesta is not accompanied by music and dance. Tarija's patron saint is **San Roque**, whose fiesta is celebrated on the first weekend of September with a religious procession accompanied by troupes of *Chuncho* dancers.

"Moto" Mendez defeated a Spanish army outside the city at the battle of **La Tablada**. After this victory Tarija enjoyed eight years of de facto independence before voting to join the newly proclaimed Republic of Bolivia rather than Argentina in 1825.

Though its population has mushroomed to over 100,000 people in recent decades, the city itself remains provincial in all the best senses of the word, small enough to get around on foot and culturally self-contained, but open to foreign influences and welcoming to outsiders. Though it doesn't boast much in the way of formal tourist attractions, the laid-back and gregarious Chapacos make Tarija a great place to hang out for a few days and relax, and if you happen to be passing through around **Carnaval** time it's well worth stopping to take part in what's widely considered one of Bolivia's most enjoyable fiestas. The countryside around the city is beautiful without being spectacular, particularly in the spring (Jan–April), when the vineyards come to fruit and the whole valley blooms. Above the valley to the west, the **Reserva Biológica Cordillera del Sama** is home to some striking high Andean scenery, as well as an Inca trail that drops down into the valley, making an excellent hike.

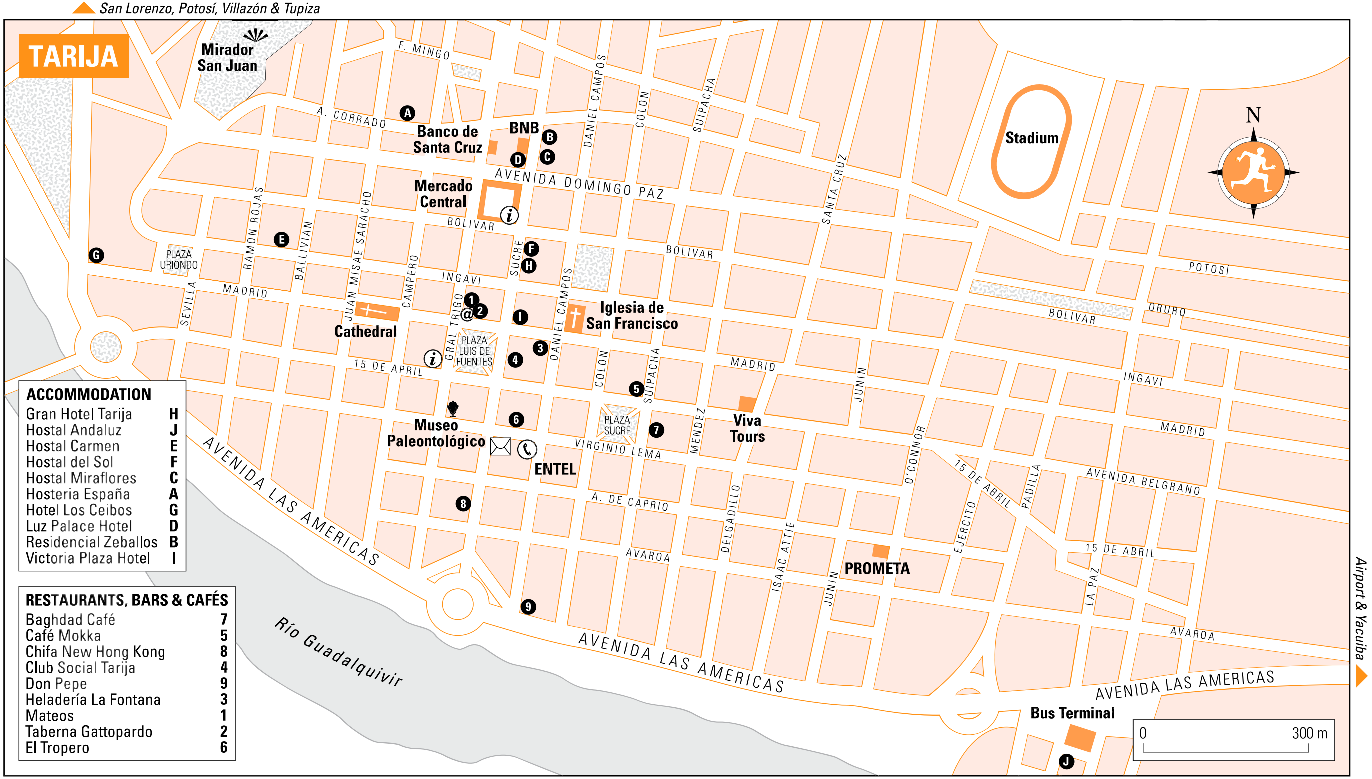
Arrival and information

The **bus terminal** is ten blocks or so southeast of the city centre on Avenida Las Américas – it has a helpful bus information office (daily 6am–noon & 3–8pm; Ⓣ04/6636508), as well as telephones and restaurants. It's about twenty minutes into the city centre on foot from here, or a short **taxi** ride ($0.50). Alternatively, catch one of the frequent **micros** that run along Avenida Las Américas from the stop opposite the terminal. The **airport** (Ⓣ04/6642282 or 6631270) is on the outskirts of town a few kilometres further east along Avenida Las Américas. A taxi into the town centre from here should cost about $1, and there are also frequent micros. Unusually for Bolivia, micro stops in Tarija are marked with the destination of the vehicles that stop at them, though other than travelling to the bus terminal or the airport, you're unlikely to use them, as distances within the compact centre are easily walkable. To return to the airport or bus terminal, catch a micro heading east along Calle Domingo Paz.

There are two **tourist information offices** in Tarija, but sadly they compete with each other for the title of worst in the country. The Oficina Departmental de Turismo (Mon–Fri 9.30am–noon & 2.30–6.30pm; Ⓣ04/6631000), on the Plaza Luis de Fuentes, should be able to provide a free map of the city, but is otherwise laughably unhelpful. The Oficina Municipal de Turismo (Mon–Fri 9.30am–noon & 2.30–6.30pm; Ⓣ04/6650144), on the corner of Bolívar and Sucre, is slightly better, with a range of free leaflets and maps and some chance of getting basic questions answered in Spanish. Better sources of information are the city's two **tour operators**: Viva Tours, on 15 de Abril and Delgadillo, and VTB Tours, inside the *Hostal Carmen* at Ingavi and Ballivián, though the main aim of both is obviously to sell you a trip. For permission to visit the Reserva Biológica Cordillera del Sama (see p.247) and information on it and other protected areas in the department of Tarija, go to the conservation group **PROMETA** at Alejandro del Carpio and O'Connor (Ⓣ04/6645865 or 04/6633873, Ⓔsamatja@olivo.tja.entelnet.bo).

Accommodation

Tarija has a good range of **accommodation**, almost all located in the very centre of town – the exceptions are around the bus terminal, though there's no



TARIJA

San Lorenzo, Potosí, Villazón & Tupiza
Airport & Yacuiba
Mirador San Juan
N
Stadium
Banco de Santa Cruz
BNB
Mercado Central
Cathedral
Iglesia de San Francisco
Museo Paleontológico
ENTEL
Viva Tours
PROMETA
Bus Terminal
PLAZA URIONDO
PLAZA LUIS DE FUENTES
PLAZA SUCRE
Río Guadalquivir
AVENIDA LAS AMERICAS
AVENIDA DOMINGO PAZ
AVENIDA BELGRANO
F. MINGO
A. CORRADO
RAMON ROJAS
BALLIVIAN
JUAN MISAE SARACHO
CAMPERO
GRAL TRIGO
SUCRE
DANIEL CAMPOS
COLON
SUIPACHA
SANTA CRUZ
MENDEZ
O'CONNOR
15 DE ABRIL
PADILLA
EJERCITO
LA PAZ
AVAROA
DELGADILLO
ISAAC ATTIE
JUNIN
A. DE CAPRIO
VIRGINIO LEMA
15 DE APRIL
SEVILLA
MADRID
INGAVI
BOLIVAR
ORURO
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ACCOMMODATION	
Gran Hotel Tarija	H
Hostal Andaluz	J
Hostal Carmen	E
Hostal del Sol	F
Hostal Miraflores	C
Hosteria España	A
Hotel Los Ceibos	G
Luz Palace Hotel	D
Residencial Zeballos	B
Victoria Plaza Hotel	I

RESTAURANTS, BARS & CAFÉS	
Baghdad Café	7
Café Mokka	5
Chifa New Hong Kong	8
Club Social Tarija	4
Don Pepe	9
Heladería La Fontana	3
Mateos	1
Taberna Gattopardo	2
El Tropero	6

point staying down there unless you're just passing the night before continuing your journey. Some of the city's mid-range hotels are particularly good value, making Tarija a good place to splash out on a little luxury.

Gran Hotel Tarija Sucre 762 ⓣ04/6642893 or 6642684, ⓔreservas@hoteltarija.com. Modern business hotel with comfortable carpeted a/c rooms and all the usual amenities – including a restaurant and bar, sauna and cable TV – though not much character. Breakfast included. ⑤

Hostal Andaluz Behind the bus terminal on Av Victor Paz ⓣ04/6631436. Simple and clean lodgings, despite the unattractive exterior, and with a reasonable steak restaurant downstairs. Convenient if you're just stopping in Tarija overnight to break a journey. ②

Hostal Carmen Ingavi 784 ⓣ04/6643372 or 6644341, ⓔvtb@entelnet.bo. Recently refurbished *hostal* with warm, well-decorated rooms set around a glass-roofed central patio and boasting plentiful hot water, and cable TV – there's also a small apartment with kitchen for longer stays. Breakfast included. ④

Hostal del Sol Sucre 782 ⓣ04/6665259, ⓔhostaldelsol@entelnet.bo. Stylish modern hotel in the centre of town across from the central market – the best bet in its price range. Internet, cable TV, and breakfast included. ⑤

Hostal Miraflores Sucre 920 ⓣ04/6643355 or 6644976, ⓕ04/663091. Converted colonial house with a sunny central courtyard, helpful and efficient staff, and a choice between comfortable rooms with cable TV and private bath, or small, spartan rooms without. ②–③

Hostal Zeballos Sucre 966 ⓣ04/6642068 or 6633313. Rather ramshackle but welcoming little place, offering simple but clean rooms (with or without bath) set around a bright courtyard overflowing with plants and flowers. Breakfast included. ②–③

Hosteria España Corrado 546 ⓣ04/6641690. Friendly and welcoming, with small but clean rooms set around a flower-filled courtyard, though the cheaper rooms without private bath are windowless cells. Laundry facilities available. ③

Hotel Los Ceibos Av Las Américas and Madrid ⓣ04/6634430, ⓔceibohot@ cosett.com.bo, ⓦwww.hotellosceibos.com. Luxurious and relatively good-value hotel, with warm, spacious and well-appointed modern rooms with cable TV, all with balconies overlooking a large swimming pool. There's also a bar-restaurant, and breakfast is included. ⑥

Luz Palace Hotel Sucre 326 ⓣ04/6635700 or 6635701, ⓔluzpalac@olivo.tja.entelnet.bo. Modern and stylish business hotel, with bright and spacious rooms with cable TV set around a glass-roofed central patio. Breakfast included. ⑤

Victoria Plaza Hotel Madrid and Sucre ⓣ04/6642600, ⓔhot_vit@olivo.tja.entelnet.bo. Grand but rather old-fashioned hotel overlooking the main plaza, with lavish, well-equipped rooms, cable TV and a bar-café. Breakfast included. ⑥

The City

Laid out in the classic grid pattern of Spanish colonial cities, Tarija has few obvious sightseeing attractions – its appeal lies more in the easy charm of its citizens and the warm, balmy climate. The centre of town is the peaceful, palm-lined **Plaza Luis de Fuentes**, named after the city's founder, whose statue stands in the middle, dressed in full conquistador armour, flourishing his sword in front of him. The **Cathedral**, a block west of the plaza, is a dull modern construction whose only redeeming feature is the brightly coloured stained glass depicting local peasants harvesting grapes. It stands on the site once occupied by the Jesuit college, founded in 1690, which was an important base for missionary ventures down into the Chaco before the order was expelled from the Spanish empire in 1767. A block east of the plaza on Calle Madrid is the simple **Iglesia de San Francisco**, the first church in Tarija when it was founded in 1606. The Franciscan college beside the church still houses a massive archive of historical documents from several centuries of Franciscan missionary endeavour, and there's also a small collection of colonial religious art inside, but you'll need to persuade one of the priests to show you around.

A block south of the plaza on the corner of Virginio Lema and Trigo, the outstanding **Museo Paleontológico** (Mon–Fri 8am–noon & 3–6pm, Sat 9am–noon & 3–6pm; free) is worth visiting for its fantastic collection of **fossils** from the Tarija valley. Most of the fossils on display are of mammals from the Pleistocene era, between a million and 250,000 years ago, many of them from species similar to ones that still exist today, such as horses, bears and llamas. There are also a large number of bones from the extinct **Andean elephant**, or mastadon, including several complete skulls with tusks over 1.5m long and a complete skeleton, along with photos of its discovery by a Tarijeño family in their backyard on the outskirts of the city. Also on display are an enormous skull and many bones of the **megatherium**, or giant sloth, at 5m long one of the biggest land mammals ever to exist, and said by scientists to be long extinct, though it's rumoured to live on in the depths of the Amazon rainforest. Stranger still is the almost complete fossilized skeleton of a **glyptodon**, an extinct mammal whose thick armoured shell and club-like tail made it look like a distant relative of the armadillo. Upstairs there's also a small collection of archeological finds, featuring the usual ceramics, arrowheads and mummified bodies, though it pales in comparison with the fossils downstairs.

On a hilltop above the city to the west is the **Mirador San Juan**, a pleasant park shaded by palm trees with good views across the red-tiled rooftops of Tarija and the mountains rising above the valley beyond. To get there, walk west along Avenida Domingo Paz then follow the Stations of the Cross up the hill to your right.

Eating and drinking

Nowhere is Tarija's strong Argentine influence more evident than in its **restaurants**. Good-quality grilled beef features strongly, ideally accompanied by a glass of local wine, while Tarijeños are also justly proud of their distinctive traditional cuisine featuring chicken and meat dishes cooked in delicious spicy sauces – try **ranga-ranga**, **saice** or **chancao de pollo** – meat (or chicken) dishes cooked in delicious spicy sauces. As usual, the best place to sample these is in the **Mercado Central** on the corner of Sucre and Bolívar, where you can also find fresh fruit juices and early-morning breakfasts. A particular local speciality is **sopa la poderosa**, a rich soup made with a bull's penis – unsurprisingly, it's considered a powerful aphrodisiac.

In keeping with the city's laid-back and gregarious Mediterranean flavour, **nightlife** tends to involve sitting around outdoor tables with a bottle or two of wine until late at night. On the weekends, local youngsters tend to congregate on the **Plaza Sucre** to indulge in billiards, pizza and beer.

Baghdad Café Plaza Sucre. Cosy little bar-café with a bohemian atmosphere – it attracts a lively young crowd who come here for wine and hot snacks in the evening.

Café Mokka Plaza Sucre. Café with outdoor seating on Plaza Sucre serving excellent espresso and crêpes in the morning as well as the typical, but somewhat pricey, meat and pasta fare into the evening.

Chifa New Hong Kong Sucre and Victor Paz. Complete with laughing Buddhas and fish tanks, the decor in this Chinese restaurant is more authentic than the food, but it still makes an enjoyable change. Main dishes big enough for two people go for about $3.50, and you can get a filling *almuerzo* or *cena* for $2. Closed Sun.

Club Social Tarija Plaza Luis de Fuentes. Good-value traditional *almuerzos* in a rather staid atmosphere favoured by Tarija's business community and older citizens.

Don Pepe Daniel Campos and Las Américas. Spacious open-air restaurant with good-value traditional meat dishes; it gets popular at weekends, when there's live folk music.

Heladería La Fontana Madrid and Daniel Campos. Popular ice-cream parlour that's a good place to cool down in the afternoons; also serves snacks and cold drinks.

Mateos Trigo and Madrid. Superior restaurant with indoor and outdoor seating and a refined ambience, serving a superb four-course *almuerzo* ($3.50), as

Moving on from Tarija

Tarija's isolation is underlined by the fact that Bolivia's two biggest cities, **La Paz** and **Santa Cruz**, are both 24 hours away by road. Both are served by several **buses** a day – via Potosí and Oruro for La Paz and via Villamontes in the Chaco for Santa Cruz. Several buses a day make the trip to **Potosí** (12hr), from where there are connections to Cochabamba, Oruro and Uyuni. There are two or three buses a day to **Tupiza** (9hr), but these leave in the evening and travel overnight. If you don't want to miss the scenic views on this route, get one of the two or three services that leave in the morning to **Villazón**, from where you can catch another bus to make the short journey on to Tupiza in the afternoon. If you're travelling down into the **Chaco** it's worth going by day if you can, as the roads taken by buses to Villamontes (3–4 daily; 10–12hr) and Yacuiba (6–8 daily; 10–12hr) pass through a beautiful and sparsely populated landscape, twisting over a succession of jagged mountain ridges, covered with dense scrubby forest and cacti, that march down into the plains. The closest border crossing into **Argentina** is at Bermejo (5–6 daily; 4hr), a gas- and sugar-producing town just over 200km south of Tarija.

Given the distances involved, it's tempting to move on from Tarija **by air**. AeroSur flies several times a week to Cochabamba, La Paz and Santa Cruz, while the military airline TAM flies once a week to La Paz and Santa Cruz.

well as à la carte meat, fish and pasta dishes; there's also a very good salad bar.

Taberna Gattopardo Plaza Luis de Fuentes. Stylish bar-restaurant serving a wide range of well-prepared meals including pizza, pasta, grilled meat and chicken dishes. It's also a popular place to enjoy a cold beer or a glass of wine, and there's a choice between outdoor seating on the plaza and discreet booths inside. It gets pretty lively at weekends, and stays open late.

El Tropero Virginio Lema and Daniel Campos. Authentic Argentine steakhouse with outdoor seating serving excellent grilled beef and chicken as well as a filling *almuerzo* for $2.

Listings

Airlines AeroSur, 15 de Abril Ⓣ04/6630893.

Banks and exchange The Banco Nacional de Bolivia, opposite the *Hotel Gran Tarija* on Sucre, changes cash and traveller's cheques and has an ATM that takes Visa and Mastercard. There are several other ATMs in town, including at the Banco de Santa Cruz on Trigo and Domingo Paz.

Bus information Ⓣ04/6636508.

Consulate The Argentine consulate is on Ballivián and Bolívar Ⓣ04/6644273.

Internet access Ciber Meg@net, Madrid and Trigo, as well as many others along both Trigo and Sucre.

Laundry La Esmeralda, Madrid between Campos and Colón.

Post office The Correo Central is on Lema and Sucre.

Radio taxis Moto Méndez Ⓣ44480; Tarija Ⓣ43478.

Telephone office The ENTEL office is on Lema and Daniel Campos.

Tour operators VTB Tours, inside the *Hostal Carmen* at Ingavi 784 Ⓣ04/6644341, Ⓔvtb_hostalcarmen@hotmail.com, and Viva Tours, 15 de Abril and Delgadillo Ⓣ04/6638325, Ⓔvivatour@cossett.com.bo, both run one-day tours of the city and around the vineyards and bodegas of the Tarija Valley with experienced English-speaking guides. Both also take groups on the Inca Trail in the Reserva Cordillera del Sama (p.247), while VTB run paleontology tours on which you can find and excavate your own fossil (though you can't keep it).

Around Tarija

There are some worthwhile excursions close to Tarija in the warm and fertile **Tarija valley**, which is notable for its sleepy but welcoming villages and easy pace of life. Just outside the city near the airport are rich **fossil** deposits that attract paleontologists from all over the world, while further afield you can visit the bodegas and lush **vineyards** of the world's highest wine-producing region.

Tarija Valley fossils

About 5km outside Tarija to the northeast, the eroded gulches and badlands around the airport and the gas pipeline on the other side of the main road are a treasure-trove for **fossil** hunters. The sedimentary layers of volcanic ash, clays and sand here are full of well-preserved fossilized bones and teeth from Pleistocene megafauna like the mastodon (Andean elephant) and megatherium (giant sloth), as well as distant ancestors of llamas, horses and other contemporary mammals, and every year, rain washes away more of the steep canyon sides to reveal further remains. If you take a micro or taxi out to the airport and wander around for a while, you're likely to come across fossils embedded in the crumbling sides of canyons, though to the untrained eye they can be difficult to recognize. If you find anything major you should report it to the Museo Paleontológico in Tarija, and on no account take away anything you discover. If you've a particular interest in fossils then it's worth hiring a knowledgeable **guide** through one of the tour agencies in Tarija (see p.241), as this way you're likely to see, and understand, far more. VTB Tours run special fossil-hunting trips with university approval in which you're allowed to excavate major fossils under supervision before handing them over to the museum – an opportunity no budding paleontologist should pass up.

Tarija valley vineyards

The **Tarija valley** and surrounding area is Bolivia's prime wine-producing region, and a visit to one of the **bodegas** (wineries) to see how the wines are produced (and sample a few glasses at source) makes an excellent half-day excursion from the city. The first vines were planted by Franciscan monks, who found the soil and climate of the Tarija valley ideal for producing wine, and during the colonial era Tarija produced much of the wine consumed in Potosí, as well as large quantities of **singani**, a fierce, white-grape brandy with a strength of about 40° proof which is extremely popular throughout Bolivia. Today, Tarija's expanding wine industry produces well over two million litres of wine a year, with a growing number of wines made with fine grape varieties like cabernet, sauvignon, merlot and riesling. Wine consumption within Bolivia is growing and production techniques in the main bodegas have been modernized, with quality improving all the time. The main obstacle to further increases in production is the influx of contraband wine from Chile and Argentina, which is much cheaper than Bolivian wine, since no duty is paid on it.

At up to 2000m above sea level, these are the highest vineyards in the world; they are at their greenest and most beautiful during the February to March grape harvest. On a visit to one of the bodegas you can see all the stages of the production process, including pressing, fermentation, storage and – for *singani* – distillation. The closest bodega to Tarija is **Aranjuez**, on the southern outskirts of the city, while **Kohlberg** and **Casa Real** are in Santa Ana, a small village about 15km further southeast. Generally you can only visit these three bodegas on an organized trip with Tarija-based agencies (about $6 per person for a half-day tour). Further south, about 35km away from Tarija in the idyllic Valle La Concepción, which runs down into the Tarija valley from the west, the **Concepción-Rugero** bodega (☎04/6118008) is easier to visit independently – and produces arguably the best wine in Bolivia. If you telephone in advance to make an appointment, the staff are usually happy to show you around, though you can't buy any wine on the premises and visits may not be possible during particularly busy periods of the harvest. To get there, take a micro marked "V" from the Plaza Sucre in Tarija. This will drop you in the village of Concepción, from where it's about a twenty-minute walk to the bodega along a track that heads out across a bridge to the right of the main road – ask the micro driver or anyone in the village for directions.

Tomatitas and San Lorenzo

About 5km north of Tarija, the village of **TOMATITAS** is a popular weekend getaway for Tarijeños, who come here to swim in the natural river pools during the warmer, wetter summer months from November to April. You can also picnic in the fragrant eucalyptus woods beside the river, or eat in one of the many inexpensive **restaurants** in the village, where you can sample traditional local specialities like *chicharron* (deep-fried pork) and *cangrejitos* (soft-shelled freshwater crabs fried with onions), ideally accompanied by a glass or two of the local wine.

Another 10km further north, the peaceful farming village of **SAN LORENZO** is still home to many colonial buildings including, on the corner of the palm-lined plaza, the former home of the one-handed independence guerrilla hero, **Eustaquio "Moto" Méndez**, which has been preserved as a shrine-like museum (daily 9am–noon & 2.30–6pm; free) in his honour. The leader of a guerrilla band that played a key role in the Battle of La Tablada, which liberated Tarija from Spanish control in 1817, Moto Méndez is considered the consummate ideal of Chapaco (Tarijeño) manhood. Inside, the whitewashed colonial-era house has been left much as it was when he lived there, complete with rustic furniture and agricultural tools. Also on display are a series of busts and portraits of Méndez, his spurs and stirrups and an arsenal of weapons. **Micros** "A" and "B" to Tomatitas and *trufis* to San Lorenzo depart from Avenida Domingo Paz in Tarija every ten minutes or so.

Reserva Biológica Cordillera del Sama

Starting about 5km west of Tarija, just over a thousand square kilometres of the Altiplano and the deep valleys that drop down into the Tarija valley are protected by the **Reserva Biológica Cordillera del Sama**, a sparsely populated region that is still home to many endangered Andean wildlife species including vicuñas, Andean deer, pumas and a wide variety of birds. Established in 1991, the reserve is administered by the non-governmental organization PROMETA, whose office in Tarija (see p.241) you should contact for permission to visit the region. Most of the reserve is composed of the high-altitude grasslands (*puna*) of the Cordillera de Sama, which rises above the Tarija valley to an altitude of over 4000m and marks the eastern edge of the Altiplano. The three brackish lakes here – the largest is the **Laguna Tajzara** – are home to many different water birds, including all three species of Andean flamingo. The main road from Tarija to Tupiza passes through the reserve close by the lakes, making them easily accessible from the city. You can reach here by getting on any Tupiza- or Villazón-bound bus and asking the driver to drop you at the village of **Pasajes**, about two hours' drive from Tarija. Pasajes is about 2km from Laguna Tajzara, on the shore of which is a PROMETA **visitors' centre**, equipped with a kitchen, hot water and beds, where you can stay overnight (❺) – contact their office in Tarija in advance of you want to do this.

From a high pass about two hours' walk due east of Pasajes (also reachable by 4WD from Pasajes), a well-preserved **Inca Trail** drops down through spectacular scenery to the village of Los Pinos in the Tarija Valley, making for an excellent hike. If you get an early start from Laguna Tajzara (or if you're lucky enough to get a lift up to the pass with PROMETA), at a push you can walk this trail in a day and be back in Tarija the same evening. The trail itself is a good seven- or eight-hour hike, and from its end at the village of Los Pinos it's another 16km – about three hours – along a flat road to the village of San Andrés, where you can get transport back to Tarija. If you have camping equipment, it may be better to break the walk into two days. Alternatively, you can arrange to do the hike with a tour agency in Tarija, which will provide a guide and transport to the pass and back to Tarija from Los Pinos – Viva Tours should be able to arrange an all-inclusive two-day trip for around $100 per person for a group of four to six people including equipment; alternatively, you could arrange transport and a guide (or transport alone) independently for considerably less.

The first pass is marked by a large *apacheta* or stone cairn, which is visible from Pasajes below; once you've found it, the rest of the trail is easy to follow without a guide. From the pass, the trail zigzags down to the clearly visible village of **Calderillas**, about two hours' walk away. From Calderillas, walk southeast for about thirty minutes to where two rivers meet and enter a narrow gorge. Cross over to the right bank of the river and follow the lower path that runs into the gorge along the river bank. After about 45 minutes the path climbs to the right and over a ridge, opening up spectacular views of the Tarija valley below – it's also an excellent spot to see condors. The path follows the ridge round and then zigzags down to the east to **Los Pinos**, about two hours' walk away. From here, an easy-to-follow road runs 16km to San Andrés, from where there are frequent micros back to Tarija. If you arrive after dark when the last micro has gone, use the public telephone in a shop on the plaza to call a radio taxi from Tarija to come and pick you up – they should charge about $6 for the journey.

Travel details

Trains

For full timetables, see p.196

Oruro to: Tupiza (4 weekly; 11–13hr); Uyuni (4 weekly; 6–7hr); Villazón (3 weekly; 14–17hr).

Tupiza to: Oruro (4 weekly; 11–13hr); Uyuni (4 weekly; 5–6hr); Villazón (3 weekly; 3hr).

Uyuni to: Oruro (4 weekly; 6–7hr); Tupiza (4 weekly; 5–6hr); Villazón (3 weekly; 8–9hr).

Villazón to: Oruro (3 weekly; 14–17hr); Tupiza (3 weekly; 3hr); Uyuni (3 weekly; 8–9hr).

Buses

Oruro to: Cochabamba (every 20min; 6hr); Iquique, Chile (2–3 daily; 8hr); La Paz (every 30min; 3hr 30min); Potosí (6 daily; 8hr); Santa Cruz (11 daily; 12hr); Sucre (3 daily; 11hr); Uyuni (2–3 daily; 9hr); Villazón (2–3 daily; 15hr).

Patacamaya to: Sajama (1 daily; 3hr 30min).

Potosí to: La Paz (10 daily; 10hr); Oruro (10 daily; 8hr); Sucre (every 30min; 3hr); Tarija (5 daily; 12hr); Tupiza (3–4 daily; 8hr); Uyuni (5 daily; 7–8hr); Villazón (6–8 daily; 12hr).

Tarija to: La Paz (1–2 daily; 24hr); Potosí (3–4 daily; 12hr); Santa Cruz (1–2 daily; 24hr); Tupiza (2–3 daily; 9hr); Villamontes (3–4 daily; 10–12hr); Villazón (1–2 daily; 8hr); Yacuiba (6–8 daily; 10–12hr).

Tupiza to: Potosí (8 daily; 8hr); Tarija (2–3 daily; 9hr); Uyuni (2 weekly; 9hr); Villazón (6–8 daily; 3hr).

Uyuni to: Oruro (2–3 daily; 9hr); Potosí (4 daily; 7–8hr); Tupiza (2 weekly; 9hr).

Villazón to: Oruro (2–3 daily; 15hr); Potosí (6–8 daily; 12hr); Tarija (1–2 daily; 8hr); Tupiza (6–8 daily; 3hr).

Flights

Tarija to: Cochabamba (every other day; 50min); La Paz (every other day; 1hr); Santa Cruz (5 weekly; 50min).

4

Sucre, Cochabamba and the central valleys

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BRAZIL
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PARAGUAY
ARGENTINA

CHAPTER 4 Highlights

✱ **Sucre** Known as the White City, Bolivia's official capital combines delightful colonial architecture with the lively atmosphere of a university town. See p.253

✱ **Museo de Arte Indigena** Sucre's best museum, dedicated to the remarkable weavings of the indigenous groups of the surrounding region. See p.261

✱ **Chicha** The sacred drink of the Incas, this thick, tart and mildly alcoholic maize beer can be found for sale throughout the Cochabamba Valley wherever you see a white flag on a pole – though it's something of an acquired taste. See p.271

✱ **La Cancha** Cochabamba's vast covered market is the throbbing heart of this commercial city, and of the Quechua-speaking communities of the surrounding valley. See p.275

✱ **Parque Nacional Torotoro** Set in a remote mountainous region amidst a landscape of deep canyons and rushing waterfalls, and dotted with dinosaur footprints and pre-Inca ruins. See p.283

▲ Drinking chicha

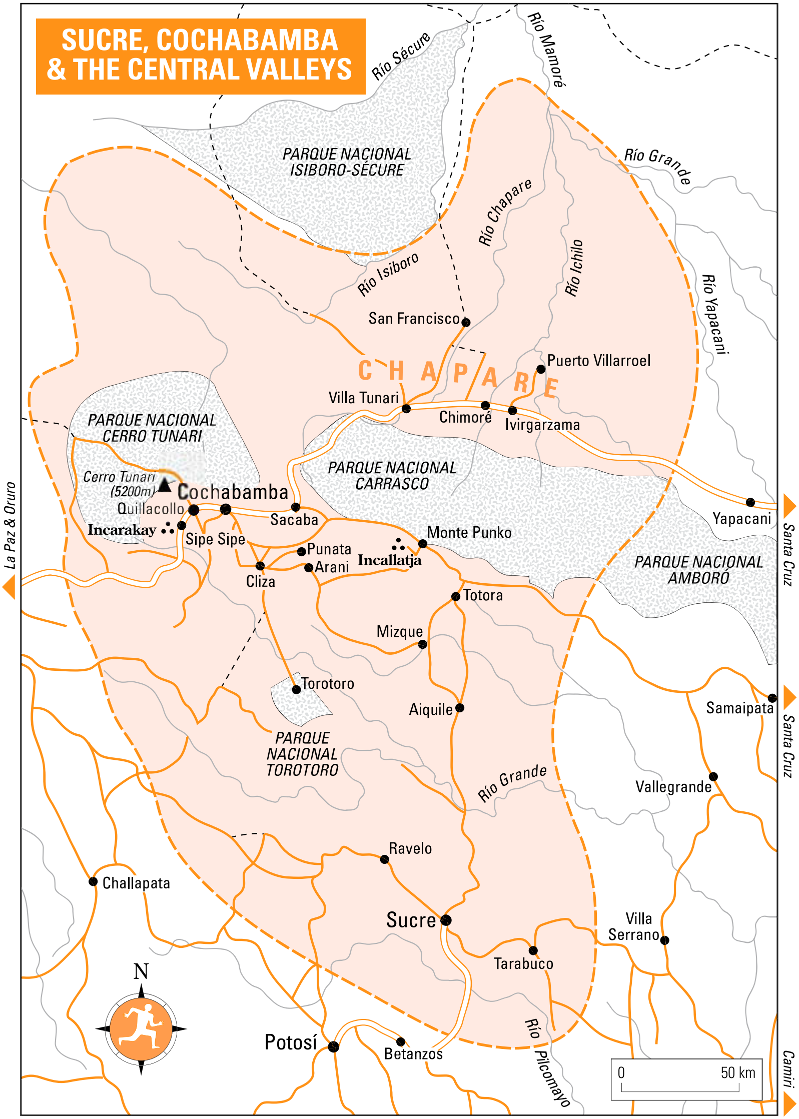
4

Sucre, Cochabamba and the central valleys

East of the Altiplano, the Andes march gradually down towards the eastern lowlands in a series of rugged north–south mountain ranges, scarred with long narrow valleys formed by rivers draining to the east. Blessed with rich alluvial soils, and midway in climate and altitude between the cold of the Altiplano and the tropical heat of the lowlands, these **central valleys** have historically been among the most fertile and habitable areas in Bolivia. The Incas recognized this, and in the fifteenth century established substantial agricultural colonies in the region, which formed the easternmost frontier of their empire – to this day the majority of the rural population still speak Quechua, the language the Incas introduced. The Spanish were attracted by the same qualities, and added wheat to the maize crops that flourished on the valley floors, which they developed as the main source of food for the mining centres of the Altiplano. The two main cities they founded, Sucre and Cochabamba, remain the most important in the region, though origins aside they could not be more different in character.

The administrative, political and religious centre of all Bolivia during Spanish rule, and still officially the capital of the republic, **Sucre** is a masterpiece of immaculately preserved colonial architecture, filled with elegant churches and mansions, and home to some of Bolivia's finest museums. Now a provincial backwater basking in past glories, it's also the market centre for the deeply traditional Quechua-speaking communities of the surrounding mountains, whose fine weavings are sold at the regional market town of **Tarabuco**.

The charms of **Cochabamba**, on the other hand, are much more prosaic. A bustling market centre for a rich agricultural hinterland, it possesses little in the way of conventional tourist attractions, and for most travellers is no more than a place to break a journey between La Paz and Santa Cruz in the eastern lowlands. Those who do spend some time here, however, find it one of the friendliest cities in Bolivia, and the surrounding Cochabamba Valley's mixture of Inca ruins and lively rural market towns is also worth exploring. It's also the jumping-off point for an adventurous journey south into the harsh, arid mountain scenery of the remote Northern Potosí province, where the diverse attractions of the **Parque Nacional Torotoro**, Bolivia's smallest national park, include labyrinthine limestone caves, deep canyons and waterfalls, dinosaur footprints and ancient ruins.


SUCRE, COCHABAMBA & THE CENTRAL VALLEYS
Río Sécure
Río Mamoré
PARQUE NACIONAL ISIBORO-SÉCURE
Río Grande
Río Chapare
Río Ichilo
Río Isiboro
Río Yapacani
San Francisco
Puerto Villarroel
CHAPARE
Villa Tunari
Chimoré
Ivirgarzama
PARQUE NACIONAL CERRO TUNARI
PARQUE NACIONAL CARRASCO
Cerro Tunari (5200m)
Cochabamba
Quillacollo
Sacaba
Incarakay
Sipe Sipe
Punata
Arani
Cliza
Incallatja
Monte Punko
Yapacani
Santa Cruz
PARQUE NACIONAL AMBORÓ
La Paz & Oruro
Totora
Mizque
Torotoro
Aiquile
Samaipata
Santa Cruz
PARQUE NACIONAL TOROTORO
Río Grande
Vallegrande
Ravelo
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East of Cochabamba, meanwhile, the main road to Santa Cruz passes through the **Chapare**, a beautiful region of rushing rivers and dense tropical forests, where the last foothills of the Andes plunge down into the Amazon basin. The area has become notorious in recent decades as the source of most of Bolivia's coca crop, which is used to make a large proportion of the world's illegal cocaine supply, and conflicts continue between government coca-eradication officers and local peasant farmers. As such, it's hardly an ideal area for travellers, but some areas remain safe to visit and provide a frontline insight into the war on drugs, one of the great dramas of contemporary Bolivia.

Sucre and around

Set in a broad highland valley on the eastern edge of the Altiplano about 162km north of Potosí, **SUCRE** is widely considered the most refined and beautiful city in Bolivia. Known at various times as Chuquisaca, Charcas and La Ciudad de la Plata – and thus also as "The City of Four Names" – it boasts some of the finest Spanish colonial architecture in South America, and enjoys a pleasant, spring-like climate all year round, thanks to its setting at an altitude of 2790m.

Sucre was the centre of Spanish power in Alto Peru throughout the colonial period, and was made **capital of Bolivia** after independence, a status it retains today, in name at least, although all real power has long since passed to La Paz. In many ways this unusual state of affairs suits Sucre very well. Whilst preserving the dignity of capital status, it has avoided many of the disadvantages faced by La Paz: its city centre has not been scarred by modern high-rises or encircled by a sprawl of urban misery, and it has escaped being the focus of the constant protests, coups and insurrections that have been a regular feature of life in the de facto capital over the last century. By contrast, Sucre exudes the sense of being frozen in time somewhere back in the late nineteenth century, and the city's incongruous official status as capital gives its citizens a somewhat exaggerated sense of their own importance. But though the courtly manners and conservatism of the old aristocratic families who dominate Sucre can seem stuffy and pompous, it's nicely tempered by the youth and vitality the city enjoys as a major university centre – Sucre's is one of the oldest universities in the Americas, and still attracts thousands of students from all over Bolivia, as well as from neighbouring countries.

The city is also the administrative and market centre for a mountainous rural hinterland inhabited by Quechua-speaking **indigenous communities**, whose traditional Andean cultures provide a welcome contrast to the sometimes over-refined and Europeanized city. These communities are particularly renowned for their beautiful weavings, considered amongst the finest in all the Andes; they can be seen – and bought – in the city itself or on a day-trip to **Tarabuco**, a rural town about 60km southeast of Sucre that hosts a market every Sunday for the surrounding communities.

Some history

The city now known as Sucre was founded some time between 1538 and 1540 (the exact date is still hotly disputed by Bolivian historians) by the conquistador Pedro de Anzures during the second major Spanish incursion into the Andes south of Lago Titicaca. Initially named **Chuquisaca** (no doubt a Spanish corruption of the original indigenous name Choquechaca, meaning "Golden Bridge"), it was given the official title **Villa de la Plata** (City of Silver) after the discovery of significant quantities of silver nearby. The title proved prescient, as the massive silver deposits of Potosí were discovered soon after, and the city quickly emerged as the administrative headquarters for the mines and the centre of Spanish political, religious and military power in the region. In 1559 the **Audiencia de Charcas** – an independent court, representing the Spanish crown, with judicial and executive power over an area comprising modern-day Bolivia, Argentina and part of Peru – was established here. The city became

Fiestas in Sucre

Sucre's main annual religious celebration is the **Fiesta de la Virgen de Guadeloupe**, on September 8, which is marked by a procession and folkloric dances. In the second half of September each year the city hosts an **International Cultural Festival**, with performances by theatre and dance groups from around Bolivia, Latin America and the rest of the world. The anniversary of the 1809 "Primer Grito Libertario de America", the first declaration of independence in South America, is marked every **May 25** with civic and military parades, and is a public holiday throughout the Department of Chuquisaca. The department's most famous annual fiesta, however, is the indigenous celebration of **Pujllay** (see p.269), staged on the third Sunday of March in Tarabuco, 60km southeast of Sucre.

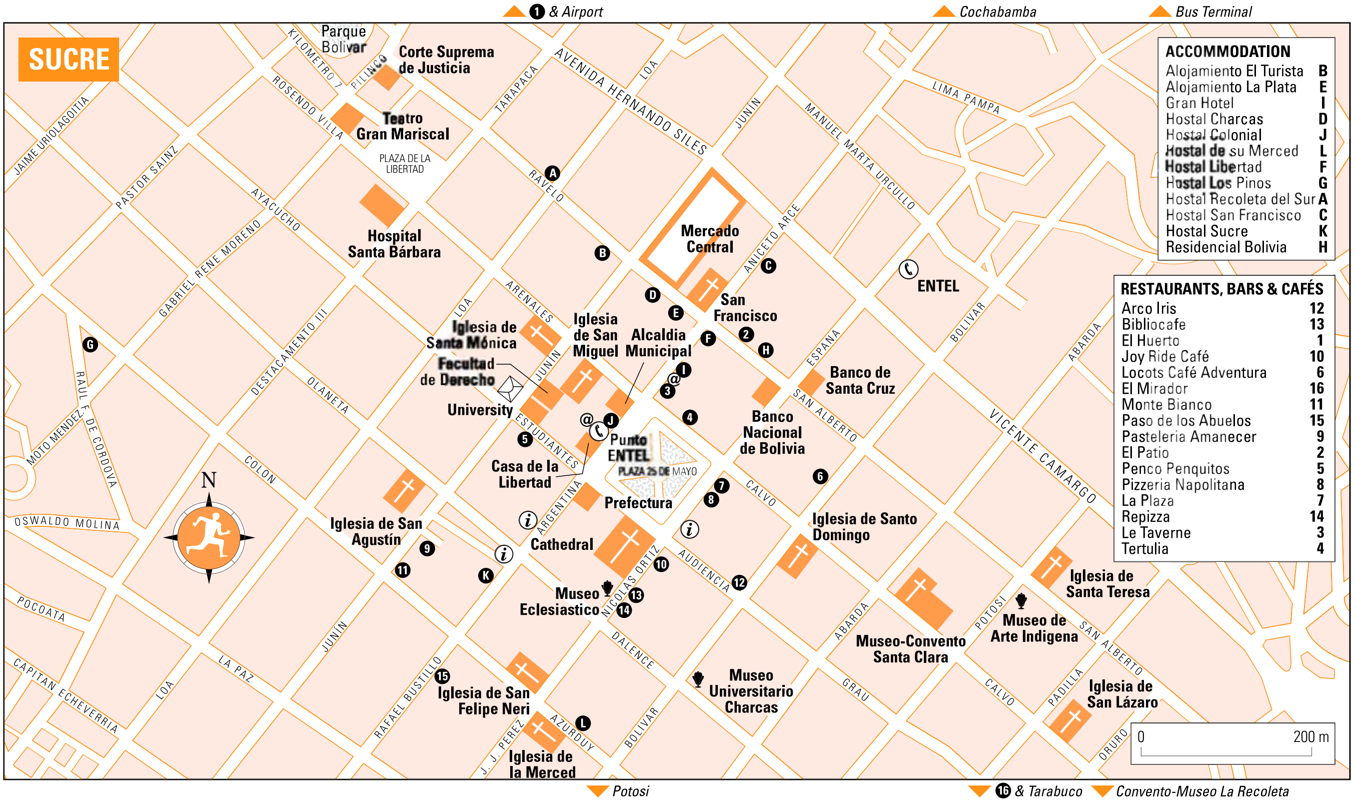
home to the first bishopric in Alto Peru in 1552, and in 1624 the **Universidad de San Francisco Javier** – only the third university in all the Americas – was founded here to train the religious and administrative specialists needed to manage the vast conquered territories.

The first half of the seventeenth century was La Plata's golden age, as the wealth from the Potosí mines funded the construction of lavish churches and monasteries, extravagant palaces and administrative buildings. The city also served as a base for the exploration, evangelization and conquest of territories to the east and south. Its power waned with the flow of silver, however, and in 1776 it was made subject to the rule of the new Spanish Virreinato de la Plata in Buenos Aires, reverting to the name of Chuquisaca to avoid confusion. The university retained its importance, even so, and became a centre in developing the liberal ideas that led to the first qualified declaration of independence from Spain, which was made here on May 25, 1809. After independence in 1825 the city was made the **capital** of the new Republic of Bolivia and renamed **Sucre** in honour of **Antonio José de Sucre**, the Venezuelan general who completed the defeat of the Spanish at the battle of Ayacucho and served as Bolivia's first president. Its economic importance continued to decline, however, and when the seat of both congress and the presidency was moved to La Paz after the civil war between the two cities in 1899, it merely confirmed long-established realities. In a very Bolivian compromise, Sucre remained the seat of the supreme court – the third of the three branches of government – and was allowed to retain the title of official or constitutional capital, an honorary position it still holds today.

Arrival and information

Sucre is a small, compact city with a straightforward grid street plan that makes it easy to navigate, and other than the bus terminal and airport everything is within easy walking distance of the historic city centre, which is where all the accommodation is located. The **airport** (☎04/6454445) is about 8km northwest of the city; Micros I and F run from there into the centre of town along Avenida Siles (30min); alternatively, a taxi should cost about $3. All long-distance buses arrive and depart from the **bus terminal** (☎04/6456732), about 3km northwest of the town centre on Avenida Ostria Gutiérrez. From here it's a $0.70 taxi ride into the centre of town, or you can catch Micro A, which runs down to the Mercado Central, a block north of the main Plaza 25 de Mayo. **Collective taxis** arriving from Potosí will drop you off outside your hotel or anywhere else in the centre of town.

By Bolivian standards, Sucre is extremely well equipped with tourist information offices. The main municipal **tourist office** (Mon–Fri 8.30am–noon & 2.30–6pm; ☎04/6455136 or 6451083) is on the first floor of the Casa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① & Airport
Cochabamba
Bus Terminal
Potosi
⑯ & Tarabuco
Convento-Museo La Recoleta
Parque Bolívar
Corte Suprema de Justicia
Teatro Gran Mariscal
PLAZA DE LA LIBERTAD
Hospital Santa Bárbara
Mercado Central
San Francisco
ENTEL
Banco de Santa Cruz
Banco Nacional de Bolivia
Iglesia de Santa Mónica
Facultad de Derecho
University
Iglesia de San Miguel
Alcaldia Municipal
Punto ENTEL
PLAZA 25 DE MAYO
Casa de la Libertad
Prefectura
Cathedral
Iglesia de Santo Domingo
Iglesia de San Agustín
Museo Eclesiastico
Iglesia de San Felipe Neri
Iglesia de la Merced
Museo Universitario Charcas
Museo-Convento Santa Clara
Museo de Arte Indigena
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PASTOR SAINZ
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RAVELO
GABRIEL RENE MORENO
ARENALES
ANICETO ARCE
ESPAÑA
BOLIVAR
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VICENTE CAMARGO
SAN ALBERTO
DESTACAMENTO III
OLANETA
ESTUDIANTES
ARGENTINA
CALVO
AUDIENCIA
NICOLAS ORTIZ
RAUL F. DE CORDOVA
MOTO MENDEZ
OSWALDO MOLINA
COLON
POCOATA
CAPITAN ECHEVERRIA
LA PAZ
RAFAEL BUSTILLO
J. J. PEREZ
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ACCOMMODATION

Alojamiento El Turista	B
Alojamiento La Plata	E
Gran Hotel	I
Hostal Charcas	D
Hostal Colonial	J
Hostal de su Merced	L
Hostal Libertad	F
Hostal Los Pinos	G
Hostal Recoleta del Sur	A
Hostal San Francisco	C
Hostal Sucre	K
Residencial Bolivia	H

RESTAURANTS, BARS & CAFÉS

Arco Iris	12
Bibliocafe	13
El Huerto	1
Joy Ride Café	10
Locots Café Adventura	6
El Mirador	16
Monte Bianco	11
Paso de los Abuelos	15
Pasteleria Amanecer	9
El Patio	2
Penco Penquitos	5
Pizzeria Napolitana	8
La Plaza	7
Repizza	14
Le Taverne	3
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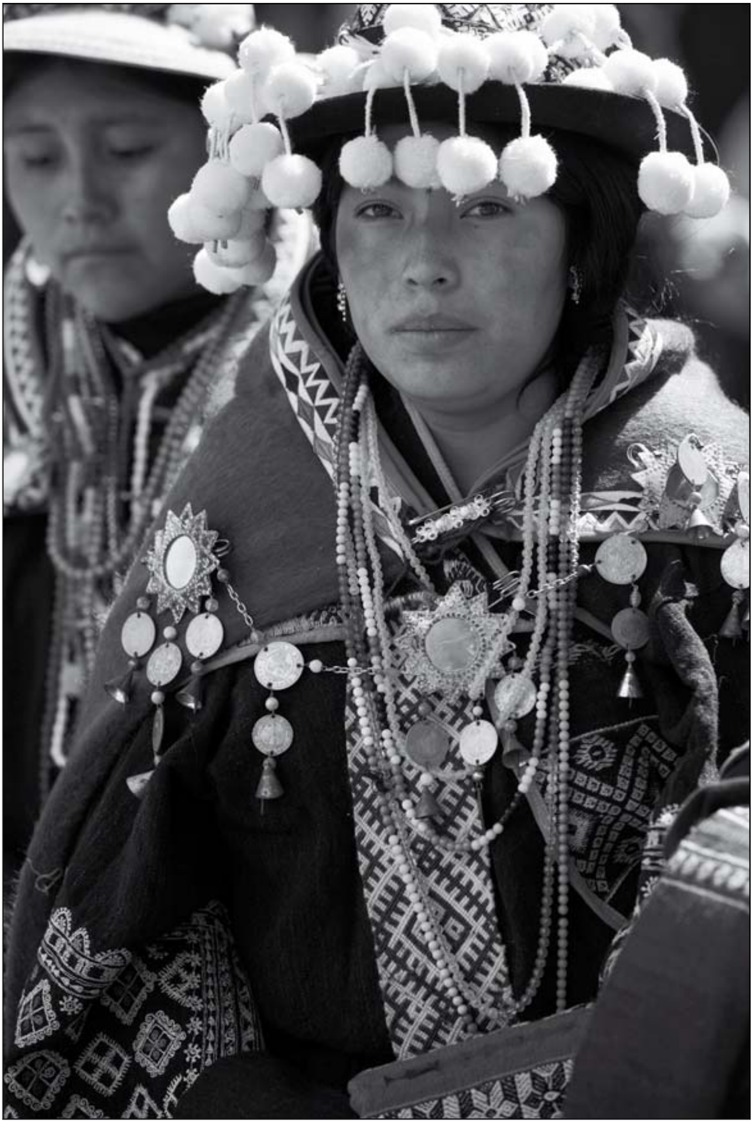


▲ Celebrating Carnival

de Cultura, a block southeast of Plaza 25 de Mayo on Calle Argentina, and there are also information **kiosks** (Mon–Sat 8.30am–noon & 2.30–6pm) at the airport, the bus terminal and on the corner of calles Argentina and Olañeta. The staff at all these offices are helpful and will do their best to answer questions in Spanish; they also usually have a colourful street map of Sucre and a glossy pamphlet on the city's major attractions available for sale, as well as a range of leaflets. There's also an **Oficina Universitaria de**

Turismo (Mon–Fri 8.30am–12.30pm & 2.30–6.30pm; ⓣ04/6452283) on the southeastern side of Plaza 25 de Mayo, run by enthusiastic university students who are a good source of information and can sometimes provide student guides (free, though a tip is always appreciated) to show you around the major sites – you'll also need to come here if you want to get onto the roof of the Iglesia de San Felipe Neri (see p.260).

Accommodation

Sucre has a pretty good range of **accommodation**, almost all of it conveniently located in the heart of the old city centre. There are some particularly beautiful places, set inside converted colonial mansions, which represent very good value in the middle and upper prices ranges: if you're on a tight budget but like to splash out every so often, this is the place to do it.

Budget

Alojamiento El Turista Ravelo 118 ⓣ04/6453172. Bright but basic and rather grubby rooms with shared bath and limited hot water. Strictly for those on a very tight budget. ①

Alojamiento La Plata Ravelo 32 ⓣ04/6452102. Popular budget option offering small but clean rooms with shared bath around a sunny courtyard. ②

Hostal Charcas Ravelo 62 ⓣ04/6453972, ⓔhostalcharcas@yahoo.com. Modern and efficient establishment, with abundant hot water and helpful, welcoming staff. Rooms are scrupulously clean but rather cramped, and those with private bathrooms lack ventilation. Breakfast available. ③

Hostal Cruz de Popayan Loa 881 ⓣ04/6440889, ⓔpopoyan@boliviahostels.com, ⓦwww.hotelsucre.com. Though it is a bit of a hike from the city centre, this newly restored rambling colonial is an attractive choice and is justifiably popular with travellers. Breakfast included. ③–④

Hostal San Francisco Arce 191 ⓣ04/6452117, ⓔhostalsf@mara.scr.entelnet.bo. Modern, colonial-style building with pleasant rooms opening onto sunny balconies around a central patio. Breakfast is available. ③

Residencial Bolivia San Alberto 42 ⓣ04/6454346, ⓔres_bol@cotes.net.bo. Friendly *residencial*, with spacious, airy rooms (with or without bathroom) set around a bright courtyard with plenty of plants. A modest breakfast is included. ②–③

Moderate and expensive

Grand Hotel Arce 61 ⓣ04/6451704, ⓔgrandhotel_sucre9@hotmail.com. A good centrally located option with comfortable and well-decorated rooms set around two peaceful colonial patios, the innermost of which overflows with lush tropical vegetation. Breakfast included. ④

Hostal Colonial Plaza 25 de Mayo 3 ⓣ04/6440309 or 6440310, ⓔhcolonialsucre@hostalcolonial-bo.com, ⓦwww.hostalcolonial-bo.com. Excellent location on the main plaza, though it feels less colonial than most of its rivals, despite the name. Rooms are adequate, if a bit musty and gloomy, and only the rather overpriced suites have views over the plaza. Breakfast included. ⑤–⑥

Hostal de Su Merced Azurduy 16 ⓣ04/6442708, ⓔsumerced@entelnet.bo, ⓦwww.desumerced.com. Immaculately restored and converted eighteenth-century house with a delightful central patio and rooftop sun terraces with panoramic views of the city. Rooms combine opulent antique furniture with a full range of modern comforts, including cable TV. Breakfast included. ⑥

Hostal Libertad Arce with San Alberto ⓣ04/6453101/2, ⓔhostal_libertad@email.com. Purpose-built modern hotel which lacks some of the charm of its colonial rivals but makes up for it with spacious, well-appointed and reasonably priced rooms (with cable TV), helpful and efficient staff, and a rooftop restaurant with excellent views. Breakfast included. ④

Hostal Los Pinos Colón 502 ⓣ04/6454403, ⓕ04/6455639. Peaceful and secluded family-run hotel with comfortable modern rooms and a delightful flower-filled garden. Breakfast included. ④

Hostal Recoleta del Sur Ravelo 205 ⓣ04/6454789 or 6446603, ⓔrecoletasur@yahoo.es, ⓦwww.boliviaturista /contur. Modern, carpeted rooms with cable TV in a converted colonial house with a glass-roofed patio and a classic stone-pillared corner doorway. Breakfast included. ④

Hostal Sucre Bustillos 113 ⓣ04/6451411 or 6461928, ⓦwww.hostalsucre.com. Converted colonial mansion with period decor and pleasant if slightly gloomy rooms set around two charming flower-filled courtyards. Cable TV, Internet and breakfast included. ④

The City

Laid out in the classic grid pattern required by Spanish imperial ordinances, Sucre is a jewel of colonial and nineteenth-century architecture, its splendid churches, monasteries and mansions a reminder of the wealth and power the city once enjoyed. The historic city centre was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1991, and strict building codes mean most of it has been preserved much as it was a hundred years ago. Neon signs are banned, and a municipal regulation requires all buildings to be whitewashed once a year, maintaining the characteristic that earned Sucre another of its many grandiose titles: "La Ciudad Blanca de Las Americas" – the White City of the Americas. In the seventeenth century the city boasted a church or chapel for almost every single block, and many of these still stand, while the extravagant sculpture and paintings that filled them are on display in several of the city's museums, in quantities large enough to exhaust even the most dedicated enthusiast. The one museum not to miss, however, is the **Museo de Arte Indigena**, which is dedicated to art of a very different nature – the beautiful weavings of the indigenous groups of the surrounding Department of Chuquisaca.

Plaza 25 de Mayo

The centre of Sucre is the spacious **Plaza 25 de Mayo**, shaded by tall palms and dotted with benches where people of all social classes – from eminent lawyers to humble campesinos – pass the time of day chatting, reading newspapers or greeting passing acquaintances. It's a great place to watch the world go by whilst having your shoes shined or enjoying a hot *salteña* or a cool glass of the orange juice which is sold from handcarts by ever-present street vendors. In the middle of the plaza, flanked by bronze lions, stands a statue of **Mariscal Antonio José de Sucre**, the Venezuelan-born South American independence hero and first president of Bolivia whose name the city bears. The plaza is lined with elegant colonial and republican public and religious buildings, all painted an immaculate white that dazzles in the usually bright sunshine.

On the northwest side of the square is the Neoclassical **Alcaldía Municipal**, the town hall, built in 1888 to replace a colonial *cabildo* dating back to 1610. Beside it stands the simple but well-preserved colonial facade of the original seventeenth-century Jesuit University, with carved wooden balconies overlooking the square and an elegant stone portico bearing the university's coat of arms. Now known as the **Casa de la Libertad** (Tues–Sat 9am–noon & 2.30–6.30pm, Sun 9am–noon; $1.50), this was where the Bolivian act of independence was signed on August 6, 1825, and the building now houses a small but interesting museum dedicated to the birth of the republic. Inside, the original signed document proclaiming a sovereign and independent state is on display in the assembly hall where the declaration was made by a constitutional assembly of 48 representatives from across the country; the same hall also housed the Bolivian congress from then until the seat of government was moved to La Paz in 1899. On the walls hang portraits of Sucre and Bolívar – the latter, by the Peruvian painter Gil de Castro, was described by the *libertador* himself as being the best likeness ever made of him. A side room houses portraits of the principal signatories, while another has paintings of pro-independence guerrillas and their royalist foes, plus a collection of captured royalist swords, guns and bloodstained banners. There's also a gallery of portraits of almost all Bolivia's presidents, an impressive number given the youth of the republic, thanks to frequent coups and assassinations, most of them looking more dignified in profile than they were in office. Around the corner on the southwest side of the plaza stands the lavish Neoclassical facade of what was to have been the **presidential palace**, a glorious monument to hubris completed shortly before the seat of the presidency was moved to La Paz; it now houses the Prefectura (departmental government) de Chuquisaca.

The Cathedral and Museo Eclesiastico

Next to the Prefectura, facing sideways onto the southwest side of the plaza, stands the **Cathedral**, or Basilica Mayor. Built between 1551 and 1712 and extensively modified since, it combines a variety of architectural styles. The side door facing the plaza and main door looking onto Calle Ortiz are both highly decorative seventeenth-century stone porticos carved in the mestizo-Baroque style, while the square belltower with three balconies decorated with statues of the Apostles and Evangelists dates from the late eighteenth century; the clock in the tower, which still keeps perfect time, was made in London in 1772.

The decor in the lavish Neoclassical **interior** dates back to 1826, with soaring pillars painted in immaculate white piped with gold, extravagant crystal chandeliers and massive silver candlesticks. A side chapel houses the jewel-encrusted image of the **Virgen de Guadeloupe**, the religious patron of Sucre. Painted in 1601 by Fray Diego de Ocaña, the image quickly developed cult status, and wealthy devotees began sticking gold, diamonds, emeralds and pearls to the picture as an expression of faith or in gratitude for wishes granted and miracles performed. These were arranged in a more orderly fashion when the image was laminated in gold in 1734, and though the popular saying that the value of the jewels would be enough to pay off Bolivia's international debt is probably an exaggeration (as well as being a veiled critique of the wealth of the Church compared to the poverty of many Bolivians), the glittering opulence of the bejewelled Virgin is astonishing nonetheless.

Though it's open most mornings for Mass, the best way to see the cathedral – and the Virgin – is as part of a visit to the **Museo Eclesiastico** (Mon–Fri 10am–noon & 3–5pm, Sat 10am–noon; $1.50), which boasts a fine collection of colonial religious art. The entrance to the museum is beside the cathedral just along Calle Ortiz. Visits are by **guided tour** only, so it's best to turn up shortly after opening, as otherwise you may have to wait a while for the next group to

▲ The Cathedral and Plaza 25 de Mayo

form; tours last about an hour. Amongst the paintings on display is a series of portraits of saints by the Cochabamba-born master of the mestizo-Baroque style, Melchor Pérez de Holguín, and several works in a much more European style by the sixteenth-century Italian-born Jesuit Bernardo Bitti, who studied under Raphael. There's also a substantial hoard of finely crafted silver and gold religious paraphernalia such as candelabras, crucifixes and chalices, much of it encrusted with gems, further evidence of the enormous wealth that flowed through Sucre (and the Church) during the colonial silver-mining boom in Potosí.

South of Plaza 25 de Mayo

Two blocks southwest of the plaza along Calle Ortiz stands the formidable Neoclassical bulk of the **Iglesia de San Felipe Neri**, with its two tall bell towers. Built in the last years of the nineteenth century, this is the only building in the city not painted white – its tall brick and stone walls have been left bare, as they have been throughout its existence. The church itself is rarely open to the public, but you can get up onto its **roof** (Mon–Fri 4–6pm; $1) to enjoy the splendid panoramic views across the city – you'll have to arrange in advance to go up with a student guide from the Oficina Universitaria de Turismo on Plaza 25 de Mayo (see p.258); they usually take visitors up onto the roof every weekday afternoon, so you get to enjoy the sunset over the city, but be aware that they're not noted for their punctuality. The adjoining **monastery**, which boasts an elegant colonial courtyard surrounded by arched cloisters on two levels, is now a school. Opposite San Felipe, on the corner of calles Perez and Azurduy, is the unremarkable seventeenth-century **Iglesia de la Merced**. It's usually locked, though if you do find it open for a service, it's worth a look inside for the extravagant Baroque altarpieces smothered in gold leaf, one of which is thought to be the oldest in Bolivia; the elaborately carved wooden pulpit and altar are also very beautiful.

Housed in a delightful seventeenth-century mansion a block east of La Merced on the corner of calles Dalence and Bolívar is the rambling but worthwhile **Museo Universitario Charcas** (Mon–Sat 9am–noon & 3–6pm; $1.50), which is really four museums in one, combining the university's archeological, anthropological, colonial and modern art collections, all set around a series of colonial patios filled with flowers and surrounded by arched cloisters. Visits are by guided tour only and last at least an hour: you'll be assigned a student guide on arrival. Some of the guides speak a little English, and how long the tour lasts depends on your and their enthusiasm: don't be afraid to hurry the guide through any sections you find unexciting and linger in those you find more interesting.

The **modern art** collection is perhaps the least impressive of the four, comprising works by local artists in derivative styles ranging from surrealism and abstract expressionism to socialist realism, applied to local subjects: romanticized depictions of the indigenous cultures of the region surrounding Sucre predominate. The **colonial religious art** collection is much more substantial and includes some very fine works, though the subject matter – Christ, the Virgin, and assorted saints and bishops – is repetitive, to say the least. Highlights include a whole room full of pictures by the mestizo-Baroque master **Melchor Pérez de Holguín** and a finely detailed bird's-eye view of Potosí painted in 1758 by Gaspar Miguel de Berrio. There's also some beautiful colonial furniture on display, including decorative desks richly inlaid or delicately carved with images of flowers and animals, and wooden "portable chapels", taken by priests on expeditions to convert the indigenous populations, which unfold to reveal carved figures of saints and brightly painted biblical scenes.

The **anthropology** section is a mishmash of indigenous costumes and artefacts from all over Bolivia: Andean musical instruments; woven vegetable-fibre clothes from the Amazon; lurid *diablada* masks from Oruro. Particularly striking are the traditional Tarabuceño costumes, with their bright striped ponchos, leather hats shaped like the helmets of the conquistadors, and thick-soled wooden shoes. The **archeology** section comprises an extensive collection of artefacts – pottery, tools, weapons, some metalwork, textile fragments – from all the major Andean civilizations, ranging from paleolithic arrowheads through to Inca copper axe heads and idols, all displayed chronologically, though with little explanation or background information.

Two blocks northeast along Calle Bolívar on the corner with Calvo stands the rather plain **Iglesia de Santo Domingo**, founded by the Dominican order in 1545 but extensively remodelled in the early eighteenth century. If you still have an appetite for further colonial religious art after visiting the university and cathedral museums, it's worth a trip to the **Museo-Convento Santa Clara** (Mon–Fri 9am–noon & 3–6pm, Sat 9.30am–noon; $0.80), a block southeast on the corner of Calvo and Bolívar. This still-functioning nunnery has a range of fairly standard colonial religious pictures, most of them painted by anonymous indigenous artists in Sucre in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as well as some antique furniture and religious vestments; you can also see the church's Neoclassical interior, most notable for its seventeenth-century organ.

Two blocks further southeast on Calvo stands the **Iglesia de San Lázaro**, the oldest church in the city and the original cathedral, which was first built around 1538 but extensively remodelled over the following centuries; the building you see today is an unexceptional Renaissance-style structure dating from the late eighteenth century. If you want to look inside you'll have to come at 7am, when it opens for Mass, but the elaborate carved wooden altarpiece has been painted over in white, and other than some colourful statues of saints and a particularly gruesome Christ image, there's little worth seeing.

Museo de Arte Indigena

Housed in an elegant colonial building three blocks southeast from Plaza 25 de Mayo on the corner of calles San Alberto and Potosí, the fascinating **Museo de Arte Indigena** (Mon–Fri 9.30am–noon & 2.30–6pm; $2) is dedicated to the distinctive weavings of two local Quechua-speaking indigenous groups: the **Jalq'a**, who number about 26,000 and live in the mountains west of Sucre, and the **Tarabuceños** (see p.268), a more numerous group who live around the town of Tarabuco to the east. The museum is run by the non-governmental organization ASUR (Antropologos del Sur Andino), which since the mid-1980s has been successfully working with Jalq'a and Tarabuceño communities to revive traditional weaving designs and techniques that had been dying out as older textile pieces were bought by collectors, leaving no examples to inspire younger weavers. This renaissance of indigenous art has seen both the quality and market value of the weavings of both groups rise dramatically, turning the craft into a source of income for hundreds of desperately poor campesino families.

Expertly laid out, with precise text explanations in Spanish, English, French or German, the museum introduces the different ethnic groups with maps and colour photos, then explains the weaving techniques (with plenty of examples of looms and other tools) and describes the different plants used to make natural dyes. There's often a Jalq'a or Tarabuceño woman weaving away in the courtyard as you wander around the museum, so you can see the creative process in action. **Archeological finds** on display demonstrate that many of the wood and bone-weaving tools in use today are identical to those used in the Andes more than a thousand years ago, while some beautiful and very well-preserved ancient textile fragments reveal an astonishing continuity of style, technique and aesthetic vision stretching back over many centuries. The central attractions, though, are the weavings themselves: though they're mostly everyday items of clothing, it's hard to deny the museum's central premise that they should be treated as fine art rather than mere *artesania*. Brightly coloured, intricately detailed and laden with a complex symbolism, they're works of great creativity that express a distinctively Andean artistic vision. The textiles are displayed in chronological order, revealing the development and changing style over time – the decline in quality in the 1970s before the renaissance project began is clearly evident. There are also examples of how they are worn in daily dress and in ritual costumes for fiestas.

The difference in style between the weavings of the Jalq'a and Tarabuceños could hardly be more dramatic, even though the two groups live only a short distance apart to the west and east of Sucre. **Tarabuceño ponchos** (*unkus*) are woven with bright stripes of orange, black, red, green and gold, while smaller items like the *chu'spa* bags used to carry coca and *chumpi* waist bands are decorated with finely detailed and usually symmetrical designs depicting scenes from everyday life: wild and domestic animals like condors, horses, llamas and pumas; trees and crops like potatoes and maize; people ploughing, harvesting or dancing at fiestas. The **Jalq'a designs**, on the other hand, are entirely figurative, eschewing symmetry and abstract geometry. Woven into women's shawls known as *aqsus* and almost always only black and red in colour, they depict a kind of primordial chaos filled with a plethora of strange beasts: animals with elongated bodies and multiple heads or eyes sprouting from their tails; birds with puma heads; toads with wings. The few human figures that do appear seem lost in this forest of supernatural animals. This is the *ukchu pacha*, a mythological underworld of extraordinary and untamed creatures, over which rules the *Sax'ra*, a horned devil-like figure with wings who appears in the centre of some of the weavings, part Andean demon and part god of fertility and abundance. Many of the designs are inspired by dreams, and new themes are constantly being incorporated, but though every piece is unique they all fall within a set of artistic norms that makes them instantly recognisable as Jalq'a – both to neighbouring ethnic groups and to international art collectors. Examples of both weaving styles are available to buy in a shop attached to the museum, and though they're far from cheap, particularly the Jalq'a stuff – larger individual pieces can cost well over $100 – the money goes direct to the indigenous artists who made them, and the quality is exquisite.

Convento-Museo La Recoleta

Seven blocks southeast from Plaza 25 de Mayo, Calle Calvo climbs steeply uphill towards **Plaza Pedro de Anzares**, a broad square used as a playground by local schoolchildren which enjoys commanding views across the red-tiled rooftops of Sucre and the surrounding mountains. On the southeast side of the plaza stands the **Convento-Museo La Recoleta** (Mon–Fri 9–11.30am & 2.30–4.30pm, Sat 3–5pm; $1.20), a tranquil Franciscan monastery that now houses an interesting little museum of colonial religious art and materials related to the missionary work of the Franciscan order in Bolivia. Visits are by guided tour only, so it's best to turn up shortly after opening so you don't have to wait long for a tour – if you do have to wait, the *Café Mirador* on the other side of the plaza is a good place to pass the time over a drink whilst taking in the views over the city.

Founded in 1538, La Recoleta was for nearly three centuries the headquarters of Franciscan efforts to convert the indigenous peoples of Bolivia. Set around a series of delightful flower-filled colonial patios lined with arched cloisters, the museum is home to a substantial collection of **colonial religious paintings**, though if you've been to Sucre's other museums you may by now have had your fill of pictures of enraptured mystics and agonized saints. More interesting is the display of items relating to Franciscan missionary efforts, including bows and arrows, feather headdresses and plant-fibre clothing given to the missionaries by the different lowland tribes they contacted, and photographs of early twentieth-century missionaries, mounted on horseback in ponchos and sombreros and looking more like desperadoes than priests.

Though it dates back to 1600, the **monastery church** was remodelled in rather anodyne style in the nineteenth century: the one noteworthy feature is the exquisite Baroque wooden choir stalls in the upper choir, beautifully carved in 1674 with gruesome images of a massacre of Franciscan missionaries in Nagasaki, Japan: crucified or stabbed with lances, the monks are shown going to their deaths with the sublime smiles of those who believe their place in paradise is assured. Though it's now back in Franciscan hands, in the early nineteenth century the monastery was briefly requisitioned by the Bolivian authorities and used as a barracks; in the corridor outside the choir a plaque and portrait marks the spot where the Bolivian president Pedro Blanco was murdered during a successful coup in 1829, just five days after taking office. Beside the monastery stands the **Cedro Millenario**, a great, gnarled *cedro* tree over a thousand years old and 5m in diameter – it requires at least eight people hand in hand to encircle its trunk.

Northwest of Plaza 25 de Mayo

Half a block northwest of Plaza 25 de Mayo along Calle Arenales, the modest whitewashed Baroque facade of the **Iglesia de San Miguel** (open for Mass early most mornings), completed in 1621, conceals one of the most lavish church interiors in Sucre, with glorious carved Baroque altarpieces covered in gold leaf and an exquisite panelled *mudejár* ceiling of intricate interlocking geometric shapes. On the corner of the next block, the **Iglesia de Santa Mónica**, founded in 1547, boasts an extravagant stone portico that is the finest example of the mestizo-Baroque style in Sucre, carved with palm trees and floral designs, spiralled columns, and pillars supported by human figures looking like pre-Columbian idols; sadly, the interior is always closed.

Just southwest of Santa Mónica along Junín is the main entrance of the **University** (or the Universidad Mayor Real y Pontificia de San Francisco Xavier, to give it its full title). The university was originally founded by the Jesuits in 1624, predating Harvard in the US, and was a major seat of learning throughout the colonial period as well as an important centre of liberal thought in the early nineteenth century. Ideas developed here, particularly the so-called *Silogismo altoperuano* – the argument that the loyalty of the colonies was owed to the person of the king and not to the Spanish government, and that sovereignty therefore reverted to the colonies once King Fernando VII was forced to abdicate by Napoleon – and played a key role in the declaration of independence from Spain in 1809. The university is still central to the city's social, cultural and economic life, and is worth visiting for a look inside the **Facultad de Derecho** at Junín 652, which has the biggest colonial courtyard in Sucre, a beautiful open space flanked on all sides by arched cloisters on two levels.

A block northeast of Plaza 25 de Mayo beside the bustling public market on the corner of Ravelo and Arce, the **Iglesia de San Francisco** (daily 7am–7pm) was built between 1540 and 1581 to minister to the growing indigenous population of the newly founded city, and remains the most popular church with Sucre's Quechua-speaking population – modern signs on the walls warning against the use of holy water in witchcraft and magic reveal that, centuries later, the priests here still face an uphill struggle against deeply entrenched pre-Christian practices. The entrance to the church is flanked by two square towers, one of which houses the **Campana de la Libertad**, the bell that sounded the call to arms at the start of the pro-independence uprising in 1809. The interior boasts splendid gilded Baroque altarpieces and an elaborate panelled *mudéjar* ceiling.

Three blocks northwest of Plaza 25 de Mayo along Calle Arenales is the small **Plaza de la Libertad**, lined with palm trees and centred on an obelisk donated by the city of Buenos Aires to commemorate the 1809 Declaration of Independence. On the southwest side of the square stands the elegant Renaissance facade of the **Hospital Santa Bárbara**, built between 1554 and 1563 and still functioning as a health centre. On the northwest side is the grandiose facade of the **Teatro Gran Mariscal**, one of several buildings in this part of town built in French Neoclassical style at the start of the twentieth century. The road that runs down the right-hand side of the theatre leads to the **Parque Símon Bolívar**, a peaceful park neatly laid out in French style – there's even a model of the Eiffel Tower at its centre – which is popular with families at weekends. Looking over the park from its south end stands the grandiose **Corte Suprema de Justicia**, completed in 1945 in opulent French Neoclassical style. This is the only branch of government still based in Sucre, and as such the only real justification for the city's continuing status as constitutional capital of Bolivia.

Eating, drinking and nightlife

Perhaps because of its status as official capital and growing international population, Sucre is home to a good variety of **restaurants** where you can get everything from the spicy local cuisine to authentic Chinese, French, Italian and vegetarian food at reasonable prices. Even cheaper, if you're on a budget, is the **Mercado Central**, at the junction of calles Ravelo and Arce, which has filling soups and meals for under $1, a delicious range of fresh fruit juices, and hearty breakfasts from early in the morning.

The **salteñas** in Sucre are rightly considered the best in Bolivia, and locals consume them with a passion – they're available from stalls and handcarts throughout the city, and from specialist *salteñerias*, which open only from mid-morning to noon and serve almost nothing else. Another local speciality is **chorizos chuquisaqueños**, spicy pork sausages sold in the market and in restaurants. Sucre is also famous throughout Bolivia for the quality and variety of its **chocolates**, which you'll find on sale at specialist shops in the city centre: try Taboada, on the corner of Plaza 25 de Mayo and Calle Arenales.

Nightlife revolves around the lively student bar and café scene; many places stay open into the early hours, especially at weekends (despite the opposition of the archbishop). For late-night dancing there are also several **discos**, all dominated by the under 20s. In addition, several of the city's restaurants host frequent performances of **Andean folk music**, which are popular with locals as well as tourists, and some double as late-night drinking spots. The Casa de Cultura, on Calle Argentina a block from the plaza, also hosts frequent live folk music performances, as well as art exhibitions and other cultural events.

Restaurants and salteñerias

Arco Iris Bolívar 567. Swiss restaurant, popular with tour groups, serving decent pasta dishes for about $2 as well as Swiss classics like fondue and rosti. Evenings only; live folkloric music on Saturdays.

Las Bajos Loa 759. A good place to sample regional specialities such as *chorizos chuqisaqueños* with an attractive raised patio and an excellent set *almuerzo* $1.50.

El Huerto Ladislao Cabrera 86. Ask a local for the best restaurant in town, and the chances are they'll direct you here. The menu features excellent meat, chicken and fish dishes cooked to both traditional Bolivian and sophisticated international recipes for about $4–5, served outdoors in a beautiful garden. It's some distance north from the city centre, but well worth the taxi fare. Lunchtimes only.

Monte Bianco Colón 149. Wonderful little Italian-owned restaurant with a warm, cosy atmosphere and delicious pasta and pizza for about $3. The *penne a la vodka* is particularly good, and the tiramisu irresistible. Evenings only; closed Sun.

Paso del Los Abuelos Bustillos 216. Upmarket *salteñeria* where Sucre's wealthier citizens go for their mid-morning snacks: at $0.50 each, the *salteñas* are relatively expensive, but worth every cent.

El Patio San Alberto 18. Popular *salteñeria* serving rich, juicy *salteñas* in a beautiful colonial patio filled with bougainvillea and other flowering plants. Mornings only.

Pizzeria Napolitana Plaza 25 de Mayo 30. Sucre's longest-established Italian restaurant, serving reasonable pizza and pasta, home-made ice cream, strong coffee and a daily choice of six different set lunches for $2–3. Closed Tues.

La Plaza Plaza 25 de Mayo. First-floor restaurant whose generous $2 four-course set *almuerzos* are so popular with well-to-do locals that if you don't get here by 12.30pm you may miss out. Sadly, the tables on the balcony overlooking the plaza are almost always reserved, and the service is rather brusque. Live folkloric music on Friday nights.

Repizza N. Ortiz 78. Cosy pizzeria popular for its good-value set *almuerzo*. Not the best pizza, but they keep serving until the early hours of the morning, and the menu also includes lasagne and several meat dishes. Live folk music at weekends.

La Taverne Arce 35. Authentic French restaurant attached to the Alliance Française serving classic dishes like coq au vin, boeuf bourguignon and rabbit for about $4, as well as excellent home-made pâté and delicious chocolate gateaux.

Bars and cafés

Bibliocafé N. Ortiz 50. Bohemian bar-café attracting a good mix of locals and travellers from early evening until late at night with its mellow music and intimate atmosphere. Also serves snacks and light meals, and there are live rock bands at weekends. Closed Mon.

Joy Ride Café Ortíz 14. Trendy European-run bar-café serving tasty meals and snacks as well as cocktails and ice-cold beer. It gets particularly lively on Friday and Saturday nights and has film screenings in the evenings.

Locot's Café Aventura Bolívar 465. Newer traveller's café serving pizza and pasta favourites in an attractive space that reputedly formerly served as the stables for one of Bolivia's most notorious presidents, Mariano Melgarejo – infamous for trading a valuable swath of Bolivian territory to Brazil for a white horse.

El Mirador Plaza Anzures. Outdoor café, with fantastic views over the city, serving snacks and light meals throughout the day, along with beer, juices and excellent iced cappuccinos. Profits help fund a museum and educational project for local children. Closed Mon.

Pasteleria Amanacer Junín 810-B. Cosy little café serving delicious cakes and biscuits, run by a social project helping disabled Bolivian children. Open daytime only.

Penco Penquitos Estudiantes 54. Café-bakery serving good strong coffee, decadent cream cakes and excellent *salteñas* and pastries, including delicious hot cheese-filled croissants. There's another branch behind the Mercado Central at Av Hernando Siles 713.

Tertulia Plaza 25 de Mayo 59. Popular night-time drinking hideaway for Sucre's artists and intellectuals, dimly lit and decorated with a bizarre mix of colonial religious and surrealist art; they also serve tasty but expensive food. Closed Wed.

Listings

Airlines AeroSur, Arenales 31 ⓣ04/6454895; LAB, Warnes 126 ⓣ03/3344596.

Banks and exchange Casa de Cambios Ambar, San Alberto 7, and El Arca, España 134,

Moving on from Sucre

Buses to Cochabamba, **La Paz**, **Oruro** and **Santa Cruz** (via Samaipata) depart from the bus terminal, about 3km northwest of the town centre on Ostria Gutierrez. Most long-distance buses depart in the evening and travel overnight – you can check departure times by calling the terminal on ⓣ04/6456732. If you're heading **to Potosí**, **collective taxis** depart from outside the bus terminal as soon as they have at least four passengers. These are faster, more comfortable and more frequent than the buses, and cost only about $1 more per person. When the road is passable, usually only in the dry season, buses also run via Camiri **to Villamontes** and **Yacuiba**, an arduous but exceptionally scenic journey down from the Andes into the Chaco lowlands.

There are daily **flights** from Sucre's airport (ⓣ04/6454445) to La Paz, Santa Cruz and Cochabamba. The airport is about 8km northwest of town: micros I and F run there from Avenida Siles with Junín; alternatively, a taxi should cost about $3.

both change traveller's cheques and cash dollars at reasonable rates. There are also plenty of ATMs around town where you can withdraw cash on Visa or Mastercard, including at the Banco de Santa Cruz and Banco Nacional de Bolivia, opposite each other at San Alberto with España.

Bus information ⓣ04/6456732.

Car rental Auto Cambio Chuquisaca, Av Mendoza 1106 ⓣ04/6460984.

Hospital Hospital Santa Bárbara, Plaza de la Libertad ⓣ04/6451900.

Immigration Argandoña 4 ⓣ04/6453647.

Internet access There are Internet cafés all over the city, most of which charge about $0.60 an hour: try Punto Entel on the plaza.

Language courses Academia Latinoamericana de Español, Dalence 104 with Ortiz (ⓣ04/6460537, ⓔlatino@sucre.bo.net), part of the international Casa de Lenguas chain, offers weekly programmes of private or group lessons, and can arrange for students to live and eat with Bolivian host families or find voluntary work in Sucre.

Laundry Lavanderia Laundry, Loa with Siles.

Post office Correo Central, Junín with Ayacucho.

Telephone office The main ENTEL office is at España 271 with Camargo, and there are smaller Punto ENTEL offices on the northeast side of Plaza 25 de Mayo and on the corner of Ravelo with Junín, plus numerous card-operated phone booths on Plaza 25 de Mayo and at major intersections around the city.

Tour operators Dutch-run Joy Ride Bolivia, located inside the *Joy Ride Café* at Ortíz 14 (ⓣ04/6425544, ⓦwww.joyridebol.com), and Locot's, also located in the café of the same name, Bolívar 465 (ⓣ04/6915958, ⓦwww.locotsadventure.com), offer a similar range of activities, from single day hiking, horseback, or mountain-biking tours for about $20–30 to paragliding from $100 a day. Locot's also offers motorcycle tours – they cost upwards of $75 per person per day, all-inclusive. Machines are well maintained and full safety equipment is provided, but while a motorcycle licence isn't required for the bikes some level of experience is expected.

Around Sucre

Though less dramatic than the stark reaches of the Altiplano, the green hills and pleasant climate surrounding Sucre make this an area well worth setting aside time to explore. While the dinosaur tracks at **Cal Orko** and the market at **Tarabuco** are the most popular day-trips – and the latter will give you some sense of countryside by way of a bus window – forays by mountain bike or horse will give you a much more intimate view (for tour operators, see above).

Cal Orko dinosaur footprints

Five kilometres outside Sucre on the road to Cochabamba, the low mountain of **Cal Orko** is home to the world's biggest-known collection of **dinosaur footprints**, which were discovered in 1994 by workers at a local cement works and limestone quarry. Approximately 5000 prints from at least 150 different types of dinosaur can be seen here, covering an area of around 30,000 square metres of near-vertical rock face, an astonishing profusion given that the second-biggest known site, in Germany, contains just 240 prints from two types of dinosaur. The prints were laid down between 65 and 85 million years ago on a flat bed of mud or sand covered by shallow water, and were then covered by a protective layer of ash from a volcanic explosion. Further layers of ash, silt and other sediments followed, the prints became fossilized, and about 25 million years ago the Andes began to rise, eventually bringing them to where they stand today.

Transport to the dinosaur tracks is provided by the competing **Dino-Truck** or **Sauro Movil** – both painted pick-up trucks – ☎ 04/6451863 or 04/6436469, respectively, which leave daily at 8.30am, 9.30am, noon, 12.30pm, 2pm and 2.30pm from outside the cathedral; $1.50. There's no need to buy tickets in advance as they lay on extra transport when numbers are high.

Unfortunately, it is no longer possible to approach the tracks to a distance of closer than several hundred metres. Upon arrival you can either gaze upon the tracks through a chain-link gate or pay an additional $3.50 to enter the thoroughly underwhelming **Parque Cretácico** which has a slightly better positioned viewing platform. The entrance fee includes a guided tour of the park, but your best bet is really to skip the tour, which spends the majority of its time focusing on plaster replicas, and proceed directly to the viewing platform overlooking Cal Orko.

The prints are scattered across a long plane of greyish rock about 100m high and set at an incline of about 70°, and they look at first like so many pockmarks. Study them for a while, though, and you'll see the clear footprints of many different sizes running in long lines across the surface, and the astonishing fact that you're looking at the trails of animals who lived some seventy million years ago in the Cretaceous era begins to sink in. It's thought the site may have been the scene of a chase and kill by predators, who were followed by various scavengers. The largest prints are about 1m in diameter – these are thought to have belonged to a brontosaurus. The longest single track (and by far the longest in the world) stretches for over half a kilometre and was laid down by a baby tyrannosaurus rex known to researchers as Johnny Walker. Other species whose footprints have been identified include the three-horned triceratops and the carnivorous alosaurus. The cement plant is still operating, and new prints are constantly being revealed, but ongoing quarrying and natural erosion threaten to destroy the tracks so far uncovered. The site has been declared a national monument, but no serious conservation measures are yet in place, though there are plans to preserve them with silicon injections into the rock face. All the more reason then to visit Cal Orko while the tracks are still there.

Castillo La Glorieta

About 6km outside Sucre on the road south to Potosí is the bizarre shell of the **Castillo La Glorieta** (daily 8.30am–noon & 2–6pm; $.90), a private palace built at the end of the nineteenth century and a must for lovers of kitsch. Built over seven years from 1890 as a home for the mining baron Francisco Argandoña and his wife Clotilda, the Castillo is probably the most ridiculous construction in Bolivia, and a clear example of how wealth and taste do not always coincide. Now being gradually restored after years of neglect (it was taken over by the military in the 1950s), the extravagant pink sandstone structure combines a surreal mishmash of different architectural styles, including a minaret, a Gothic clocktower and a Byzantine onion dome, while life-size stucco horses' heads running the length of the roof add a sublime Dalí-esque touch. The once-lavish interior still boasts elaborate Neoclassical stucco ceilings, Venetian stained glass and fireplaces of pink Veronese marble, as well as portraits of Francisco and Clotilda in full princely regalia meeting Pope Leo XIII, who pronounced them "Principes de la Glorieta" during their visit to Europe in 1898 in recognition for their work looking after orphans. To reach the Castillo, take **micro #4** from the corner of calles Ravelo and Arce, a thirty-minute trip.

Tarabuco

By far the most popular excursion from Sucre is to the small rural town of **TARABUCO**, set amid crumpled brown mountains about 60km southeast of the city. The town itself is an unremarkable collection of red-tiled adobe houses and cobbled streets leading to a small plaza with an unexceptional modern church, but its real claim to fame is its **Sunday market**, which acts as a focus for the indigenous communities of the surrounding mountains, the so-called **Tarabuceños** (see box below), who come to sell the beautiful weavings for which they're famous throughout Bolivia. The market is actually a bit of a tourist trap – there are usually several busloads of foreign tourists in attendance – but it's still principally geared towards the indigenous campesinos of the surrounding region, and the stalls selling weavings and other handicrafts to tourists are far outnumbered by those selling basic supplies such as dried foodstuffs, agricultural tools, sandals made from tyres, big bundles of coca and pure alcohol in great steel drums. If you walk a few blocks away from the centre of town you can still see campesinos engaging in *trueque*, a traditional Andean

The Tarabuceños

Though they wear the same traditional costume, speak the same language (Quechua) and share many cultural traditions, strictly speaking it's not correct to refer to the **Tarabuceños** as an ethnic group: the name was simply given by the colonial authorities to all the indigenous communities living around Tarabuco. When the Spanish first arrived, the region had only recently been conquered by the Incas and marked the very limit of their domain. To secure the frontier and defend against raids by the indomitable Chiriguano tribes to the east, the Incas settled the area with different ethnic groups brought from elsewhere in the empire. All these indigenous communities speak Quechua, the lingua franca of the Inca empire, and at some point after the Spanish conquest they also adopted the distinctive costumes that give a semblance of unity today, but they have no collective name for themselves nor any tradition of collective political organization that suggests a common origin.

These distinctive **traditional costumes** make the Tarabuceños difficult to miss: the men wear leather hats, known as *monteros* and shaped like the steel helmets worn by the Spanish conquistadors, along with woollen ponchos woven with bright, horizontal stripes of red, yellow, orange and green on a brown background, and three-quarter-length white trousers. In addition, they often use accessories like *chumpi* belts and *chuspa* coca-bags that are finely woven with intricate abstract designs and pictures of people, animals and plants. Though generally more muted in colour, the traditional costumes worn by the women, particularly the woollen shawls known as *llijlas* or *aqsus*, are also decorated with beautiful and complex designs, and the ceremonial hats and headdresses they wear on special occasions match the *monteros* of the men in their unusual shape and design: black pillboxes with a flap covering the neck decorated with sequins and bright woollen pom-poms, or boat-shaped sombreros embroidered with silver thread. More even than their costumes, however, it is Tarabuceño **weavings** (see p.261) that draw travellers to Tarabuco, and selling them has become a major source of income for the Tarabuceños, who otherwise depend on agriculture for their livelihoods and live in great poverty.

Pujllay

Every year on the third Sunday of March, Tarabuco celebrates **Pujllay** (also known as the Carnaval de Tarabuco), one of the best-known indigenous fiestas in Bolivia. Pujllay commemorates the battle of Jumbate on March 12, 1816, during the Independence War, when the Tarabuceños ambushed a battalion of marauding Spanish troops, slaughtering all but the drummer boy and eating their hearts in ritual revenge for abuses committed by the Spanish. During the fiesta, all the surrounding Tarabuceño communities come to town dressed in their finest ceremonial costumes, joined by thousands of Bolivian and foreign tourists. Following a Mass to commemorate the battle, the participants stage folkloric dances and parades whilst knocking back copious amounts of *chicha* (fermented maize beer), beer and pure cane alcohol. The climax of the celebration takes place around a ritual altar known as a *pukara*, raised in honour of the Tarabuceños who died in the battle and formed from a kind of wooden ladder decorated with fruit, vegetables, flowers, bread, bottles of *chicha* and other agricultural produce. Drinking and dancing continues through the night: if you want to sleep, you're better off returning to Sucre.

system of non-monetary trade in which agricultural products from different ecological zones are exchanged according to standard ratios – potatoes for maize, dried llama meat for oranges, and so on.

You can pick up some nice souvenirs at the market, though it's best to have some idea of quality and price before you arrive (have a look at things on sale on the streets of Sucre, though prices here are generally cheaper, and the choice much wider). Small items like decorative *chuspa* coca-bags make good mementoes and are inexpensive and portable; larger items like ponchos and shawls cost a lot more. Be prepared to bargain, but not too hard: remember that many of the sellers are poor campesinos who may be desperate to sell something so they can buy essential goods to take home to their families. Also be aware that photographing people without permission is considered rude and can provoke an angry reaction: ask first, and be prepared to pay a few bolivianos for the privilege.

Practicalities

Buses and trucks to Tarabuco from Sucre (2hr; $1) leave on Sunday mornings (and most weekdays) from Plaza Huallparimachi in the east of the city, returning in the afternoon; however, it's much more convenient and only slightly more expensive to go in one of the **tourist buses** organized by hotels and tour agencies in Sucre, which will pick you up outside the Mercado Central on Calle Ravelo in the morning and bring you back in the afternoon – the *Hostal Charcas* organizes this every Sunday. If you want to stay overnight in Tarabuco, there's rudimentary accommodation in the *Restaurant Florida* (no phone; ①), just off the plaza on the road in from Sucre. There are several other restaurants on the plaza where you can get basic meals and drinks, though on Sundays it's more fun to do as the locals do and eat soup or *chicharrón* (deep-fried pork) from market stalls.

Cochabamba and around

Set at the geographical centre of Bolivia, midway between the Altiplano and the eastern lowlands, **COCHABAMBA** is one of the country's most welcoming cities, and the commercial hub of the country's richest agricultural region, the Cochabamba Valley. A broad inter-Andean basin set at an altitude of about 2600m and blessed with rich alluvial soils and a warm, spring-like climate, the valley produces abundant harvests of wheat, maize, fruit and vegetables, and also supports large dairy herds – not for nothing is it known as the breadbasket of Bolivia.

The **Incas** were quick to spot this agricultural potential when they conquered the region in the mid-fifteenth century, moving Quechua-speaking agricultural colonists here from across their empire to cultivate the maize they needed to fill the imperial granaries and feed their armies. Inca control of the area was ended by the arrival of the **Spanish**, who founded the city on January 1, 1574, naming it La Villa de Oropeza in honour of the Conde de Oropeza, father of the Viceroy Francisco Toledo, who ordered its settlement. Locals soon reverted to calling it by the indigenous place name Cochabamba, a combination of the Quechua words for lake and plain, though all but one of the shallow, swampy lakes that once stood here have been filled in as the city expanded (the exception, known as Laguna Alalay – Quechua for "Oh how cold!" – lies to the southeast of the city centre). The Spanish established haciendas to produce grain for the silver mines of Potosí, and so important was their agricultural work to the colonial economy that the valley's indigenous population was exempted from having to work in the mines under the *mita* system. When the mines went into decline towards the end of the colonial period and the early republican era, many of the hacienda lands were rented out, and the region saw the emergence of a class of small but independent Quechua-speaking **peasant farmers**, very different in culture and outlook from the rather closed Aymara *ayllus* of the Altiplano. These peasant farmers played a central role in the emergence of Bolivia's radical peasant political organizations in the 1950s and 1960s and, as migrants to the Chapare, have assumed a key role in the coca-growers' movement of recent years.

Despite its tradition of protest, however, Cochabamba is an essentially peaceful and friendly place. With a population of about half a million, it's now a modern, unpretentious and outward-looking commercial city. Named the "City of Eternal Spring", it enjoys a year-round sunny climate that is matched by the warmth and openness of its population – though most travellers who come here

Cochabamba and the Water War

Referred to by its inhabitants as "La Llacta", the Quechua equivalent of the Spanish word *pueblo*, meaning at once city and people or nation, Cochabamba is the centre of a vigorous regional identity, and throughout Bolivian history has enjoyed a reputation for political independence and rebelliousness, a tradition that continues to this day. In 2000 the city's water system was privatized and sold to a consortium of international companies which immediately doubled or even tripled water rates. In response, Cochabamba erupted in a series of spontaneous protests that became known as **La Guerra del Agua** – "the Water War". Thousands of citizens from all social classes took to the streets to demand rates be lowered, blocking roads in and out of the city. The Banzer government responded in familiar fashion: a state of siege was declared, protest organizers were arrested, armed troops were sent in, and plainclothes snipers opened fire on protesters, killing one and injuring many others. Despite this oppression, the demonstrations continued, and the water consortium eventually backed down – a popular victory which was welcomed by anti-globalization campaigners around the world.

are just passing through, those who spend time here find Cochabamba the most welcoming city in Bolivia, and a good base for exploring the understated but rewarding attractions of the surrounding valley. Chief among these, in the eyes of the locals at least, is **chicha**, a thick, lightly alcoholic beer made from fermented maize that was the sacred drink of the Incas and is still the main social lubricant in rural areas. With a tart, yeasty flavour it's definitely an acquired taste, and can play havoc with the digestion, but drinking a few glasses in a roadside *chicheria* is the best way to get talking with the local campesinos; you'll find it on sale from massive earthenware pots from *chicherias* and private homes all over the valley – just look out for a white flag or bunch of flowers raised on a pole outside.

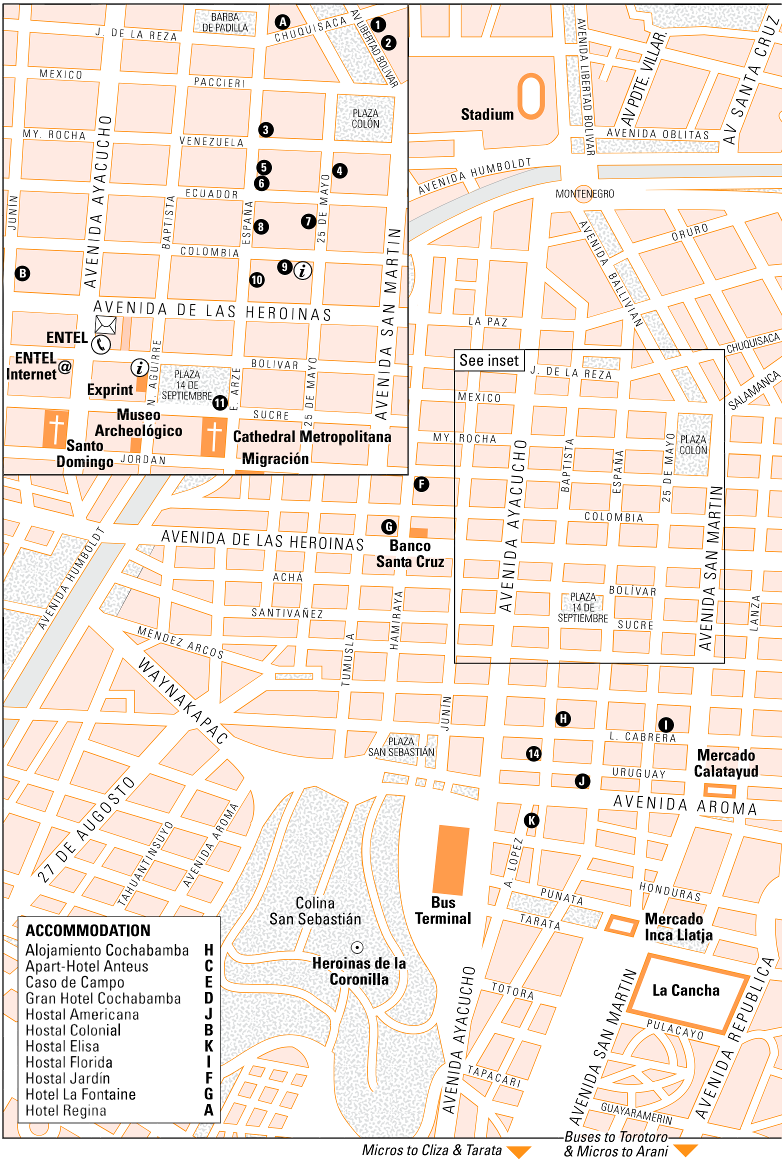
Arrival and information

Almost all long-distance buses – including those from La Paz, Oruro, Sucre and Santa Cruz – arrive and depart from Cochabamba's **bus terminal**, in the south of the city on Avenida Ayacucho just south of Avenida Aroma. The terminal is modern and fairly well organized, with a bus **information kiosk** (daily 6am–10pm; ☎04/4220550), post office, ENTEL office and plenty of phone booths, a left-luggage store, a café-restaurant, and a number of ATMs outside where you can withdraw cash on Visa or Mastercard (though you should be careful using these, especially at night). Many of the city's hotels are within easy walking distance of the terminal; otherwise, a taxi to anywhere in the city centre should cost about $0.50 per person – taxis queue up outside the terminal or can easily be flagged down on the streets. Buses from the **Chapare** region east of Cochabamba arrive around the junction of Avenida Oquendo and Avenida 9 de Abril to the southeast of the city centre. Cochabamba's extremely modern but underused Jorge Wilsterman **airport** (☎04/4222846) is a few kilometres outside town to the southwest; a taxi into the city centre should cost about $3; alternatively, take micro B, which goes up Avenida Ayacucho to Plaza 14 de Septiembre, the city's main square.

The **tourist office** located on the second storey of a building on the northwest corner of Plaza 14 de Septiembre usually has free maps of the city and a range of leaflets. Cochabamba's **street numbers** are prefixed N, S, E or O – north, south, east or west – depending on whether they run north or south from Avenida Heroínas, or east or west from Avenida Ayacucho. The first two digits in the street number refer to the block in terms of how far it is from these two major intersections, the second two to the number of the building: thus España N-0349 is on España at no. 49, three blocks north of the intersection with Avenida Heroínas.

Accommodation

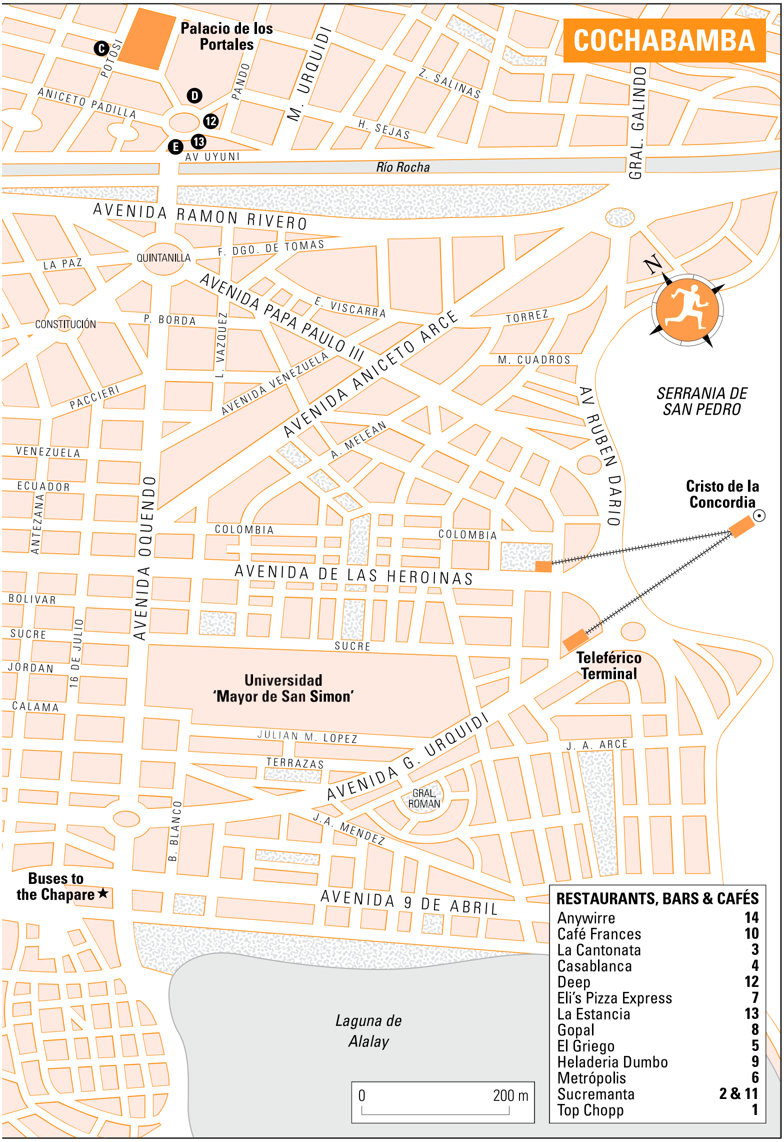
Accommodation in Cochabamba reflects the nature of the city: though functional and reasonably priced, it's unexceptional and generally not aimed at tourists (the city sees few). The better places are generally rather dull business hotels, and the budget ones – concentrated around the bus terminal – are mostly dosshouses for poor migrant workers. That said, almost all accommodation is conveniently located in the centre of town, and there are a few really quite pleasant budget places that cater primarily to tourists. The only time accommodation can be difficult to find is in mid-August during the **Fiesta de la Virgen de Urkupiña** in nearby Quillacollo (see p.281): it's best to book in advance during this period.


ACCOMMODATION
Alojamiento Cochabamba H
Apart-Hotel Anteus C
Caso de Campo E
Gran Hotel Cochabamba D
Hostal Americana J
Hostal Colonial B
Hostal Elisa K
Hostal Florida I
Hostal Jardín F
Hotel La Fontaine G
Hotel Regina A
See inset
Stadium
Banco Santa Cruz
Bus Terminal
Colina San Sebastián
Heroinas de la Coronilla
Mercado Calatayud
Mercado Inca Llatja
La Cancha
ENTEL
ENTEL Internet
Exprint
Museo Archeológico
Santo Domingo
Cathedral Metropolitana
Migración
PLAZA COLÓN
PLAZA 14 DE SEPTIEMBRE
PLAZA SAN SEBASTIÁN
AVENIDA DE LAS HEROINAS
AVENIDA AYACUCHO
AVENIDA SAN MARTIN
AVENIDA HUMBOLDT
AVENIDA OBLITAS
AVENIDA LIBERTAD BOLIVAR
AV PDTE. VILLAR.
AV SANTA CRUZ
AVENIDA BALLIVIAN
AVENIDA AROMA
AVENIDA REPUBLICA
27 DE AUGOSTO
WAYNAKAPAC
TAHUANTINSUYO
MENDEZ ARCOS
MONTENEGRO
ORURO
CHUQUISACA
SALAMANCA
LA PAZ
J. DE LA REZA
MEXICO
MY. ROCHA
BAPTISTA
ESPAÑA
25 DE MAYO
COLOMBIA
BOLÍVAR
SUCRE
JORDAN
LANZA
ACHÁ
SANTIVAÑEZ
TUMUSLA
HAMIRAYA
JUNÍN
L. CABRERA
URUGUAY
A. LOPEZ
PUNATA
TARATA
HONDURAS
TOTORA
TAPACARI
PULACAYO
GUAYARAMERIN
BARBA DE PADILLA
PACCIERI
VENEZUELA
ECUADOR
N. AGUIRRE
E. ARZE
Micros to Cliza & Tarata
Buses to Torotoro & Micros to Arani

Alojamiento Cochabamba Aguirre S-0591 ⓣ04/4225067. About the best of the many bottom-of-the-range *alojamientos* near the bus terminal, with basic rooms (with shared bathrooms) and hot water in the mornings only. ①

Americana Hotel Arce S-0788 ⓣ04/4250552 or 4250553, ⓦwww.americanahotel.net. Good-value, modern high-rise hotel with attentive staff and comfortable, well-equipped rooms with good views. ⑤

Apart-Hotel Anteus Potosí N-1365 ⓣ04/4245067. Small, modern hotel with nice views located across the street from the Palacio de los Portales in a quieter residential


COCHABAMBA
Palacio de los Portales
Migration Office
Jardin Botanico
Río Rocha
SERRANIA DE SAN PEDRO
Cristo de la Concordia
Teleférico Terminal
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F. DGO. DE TOMAS
AVENIDA PAPA PAULO III
E. VISCARRA
CONSTITUCIÓN
P. BORDA
L. VAZQUEZ
TORREZ
M. CUADROS
AVENIDA ANICETO ARCE
AVENIDA VENEZUELA
PACCIERI
AV RUBEN DARIO
A. MELEAN
VENEZUELA
ECUADOR
ANTEZANA
AVENIDA OQUENDO
COLOMBIA
AVENIDA DE LAS HEROINAS
BOLIVAR
SUCRE
16 DE JULIO
JORDAN
CALAMA
JULIAN M. LOPEZ
TERRAZAS
AVENIDA G. URQUIDI
J. A. ARCE
GRAL. ROMAN
J.A. MENDEZ
B. BLANCO
AVENIDA 9 DE ABRIL

RESTAURANTS, BARS & CAFÉS

Anywirre	14
Café Frances	10
La Cantonata	3
Casablanca	4
Deep	12
Eli's Pizza Express	7
La Estancia	13
Gopal	8
El Griego	5
Heladeria Dumbo	9
Metrópolis	6
Sucremanta	2 & 11
Top Chopp	1

neighbourhood, an easy walk from Boulevard Recoleta. ⑤

Gran Hotel Cochabamba Plaza Ubaldo Anze E-0415 Ⓣ04/4282551 or 4282552, Ⓕ04/4282558. Luxurious Art Deco country club-style hotel with spacious, fully equipped and stylishly decorated rooms looking out over a swimming pool and extensive palm-filled garden. There's also a bar and a classy restaurant, and breakfast is included. ⑧

Hostal Colonial Junín N-0134 Ⓣ04/4221791. Very friendly family-run place offering clean but slightly dilapidated rooms on two floors, overlooking a charming garden overflowing with lush tropical vegetation. Breakfast available. ②

Hostal Elisa Lopéz S-0834 ☎04/4254406, ⓦwww.hotelelisa.com. Helpful and friendly little place just a block away from the bus terminal. It's much nicer than it appears from outside, with small clean rooms (with or without bath) around a pleasant central garden with outdoor seating. There's also a cafeteria, and Internet access is available. ③

Hostal Florida 25 de Mayo S-0583 ☎04/4257911 or 4235617, Ⓔfloridah@elsitio.com. Rightly popular backpackers' favourite halfway between the bus terminal and the city centre. The simple but clean rooms (with or without bath) are set around a sunny central courtyard, and breakfast is available. ②–③

Hostal Jardin Hamiraya N-0248 ☎04/4247844. Compact but reasonably comfortable rooms (with or without bath) opening onto a peaceful garden with outdoor seating. Breakfast included. ③

Hotel La Fontaine Hamiraya N-0181 ☎04/4252838, Ⓔeduardoelc@yahoo.es. Small and comfortable business hotel offering nicely furnished modern rooms equipped with fridge and cable TV and decorated with colonial religious paintings – but beware the hazardously low ceiling beams. Internet access is available, and breakfast is included. ④

Hotel Regina Reza with España ☎04/4257382 or 4229163, Ⓔhregina@netbol.com, ⓦwww.reginacadenahotelera.com. Good-value mid-range hotel with efficient and helpful staff, plus a bar and restaurant. The large, bright and comfortable rooms have cable TV and kitchenette units, so you can cook for yourself, though they're in need of redecoration. Breakfast included. ⑤

The City

For all its charm, Cochabamba has little to offer in terms of conventional tourist attractions. Other than a few old but unspectacular churches, little remains of the original colonial city centre, though the **Museo Archeológico** is worth a visit, as is the **Cristo de la Concordia**, the Christ statue, accessible by cable car, that overlooks Cochabamba from the east and gives panoramic views over the city. Otherwise, the most interesting areas are the massive, rambling **street markets** that stretch to the south of the city centre, the commercial heart of this market city.

Plaza 14 de Septiembre and around

The centre of Cochabamba is **Plaza 14 de Septiembre** a peaceful and pleasant square with flower-filled ornamental gardens, a colonial stone fountain which (amazingly for Bolivia) actually works, and plenty of benches where Cochabambinos sit under the shade of tall palm trees reading newspapers, having their shoes shined and generally passing the time of day. At its centre stands an obelisk topped by the statue of a condor – a monument to the Cochabambinos who died during the Independence War. The plaza is flanked by nineteenth-century buildings that extend over the pavement and are supported by pillars, forming arched arcades that shade pedestrians from the sun. Sideways on to the plaza on the south side stands the **Catedral Metropolitana**, founded in 1571 and thus the oldest church in the city, though almost nothing of the original structure remains. The main entrance, facing out onto Calle Arce, is a fairly straightforward mestizo-Baroque portico decorated with spiralled columns, carvings of flowers and squat angels that look rather like pre-Columbian idols. The airy but unexceptional Neoclassical interior is brightly painted with floral designs and images of saints.

A block south of the plaza on the corner of calles Aguirre and Jordán is the interesting and extensive **Museo Archeológico** (Tues–Fri 8.30am–6.30pm, Sat & Sun 9am–noon; $2.20). As in most Bolivian museums, the items on display are poorly explained, but as you peruse the collection a picture of the evolution of pre-Hispanic culture in the Cochabamba region gradually emerges, stretching from the Tiwanaku culture (which influenced the area from about 300 AD), through a number of regional groups to the Incas, who arrived here in the mid-fifteenth century, just a hundred years before the Spanish conquest. Among the most interesting exhibits is a series of small stone idols (thought to represent the earth goddess, Pachamama), along with bronze Inca axeheads, ceremonial knives, star-shaped stone maces and some well-preserved Tiwanaku woven skull caps made specially to fit skulls deformed by ritual trepanation. Also intriguing is the series of items used by early Catholic missionaries in their efforts to convert the indigenous peoples – these include sheepskins painted with bizarre hieroglyph-like ideographs, and clay discs encrusted with fragments of stone and pottery which were used like rosaries to remember sequences of prayer and other mysteries of the faith. There's also a small display of ethnographic material from the peoples of the Amazon lowlands, including bows and arrows, vegetable-fibre clothing, sinister carved wooden ceremonial masks, and feather headdresses.

Colina San Sebastián

Just east of the bus terminal on Avenida Aroma, about 600m south of Plaza 14 de Septiembre, a tree-lined pedestrian avenue leads up to the summit of the **Colina San Sebastián**, a low hill with good views over the city that was the scene of one of the most dramatic events in Cochabamba's history. During the Independence War, Cochabamba was quick to join the rebellion against Spanish rule, but in 1812, after the city's menfolk had gone off to fight elsewhere, the women of Cochabamba found themselves virtually defenceless against an advancing royalist army. Refusing calls to surrender, the women fortified the hill where, on May 27, they fought heroically until finally overwhelmed. Known as Las Heroinas de la Coronilla, these women are commemorated by a **monument** at the top of the hill, a cast-iron statue of Christ surrounded by images of women fighting or sheltering their children. The path up to the monument is lined with busts of independence leaders, including Manuela Gandarillas, the blind woman who led the resistance here. In Bolivia, Mothers' Day is celebrated on May 27 in memory of the Heroinas de la Coronilla, a somewhat surprising example of motherhood to venerate in a country where conventional gender stereotypes generally hold sway.

La Cancha

In the south of the city, about nine blocks south of Plaza 14 de Septiembre, an entire block between calles Tarata and Pulucayo on the east side of Avenida Barrientos is occupied by the massive covered street market known as **La Cancha** (a Quechua word meaning walled enclosure), where campesinos and merchants from all over the Cochabamba department come to buy and sell their produce. Wandering through the market's sprawling labyrinth of stalls is the best way to get a feel for the vibrant commercial culture of the city and the surrounding region: the buzz of Quechua fills the air and the traditional costumes of different campesino groups are very much in evidence, in particular the straw sombreros and bright-coloured *pollera* skirts of the women of the Cochabamba valley. This is effectively one massive clearing house for agricultural produce, and the range of foodstuffs on sale reflects the full diversity of Bolivia's different ecological zones. You'll also find pretty much anything else poor Bolivians might need: sacks, rope, ironmongery, medicinal herbs, ritual items for making offerings to Pachamama and the mountain gods, along with cheap manufactured goods. One consequence of the free-market economic policies pursued by successive Bolivian governments since the mid-1980s has been an explosion in the number of people trying to make a living by buying and selling in the market, and La Cancha has since overflowed its original bounds, spreading across Avenida Barrientos onto the disused railway, and northwest to occupy another entire block between Tarata and Punata, an area now known as the **Mercado Inca Llajta** (Inca Town in Quechua).

Palacio de los Portales

About 1km north of the city centre, with its entrance on Avenida Potosí, the **Palacio de los Portales** (visits by guided tour only, Mon–Fri 4.30pm in Spanish and 5pm in English, Sat 11am in Spanish and 11.30am in English; $1.50) is the luxurious former house of the Cochabamba-born "King of Tin" **Simón Patiño** (see box, p.192). Built between 1915 and 1922 in a bizarre mix of architectural styles including French Neoclassical and *mudejár*, the palace shows that the mining magnate possessed rather more money than artistic sense. The interior is decorated with astonishing opulence: marble fireplaces and statues of Roman emperors and St Bernard dogs; walls covered in rich damask or panelled in fine wood; Venetian crystal chandeliers and Louis XV furniture. If anything, though, it's the magnificent garden that really impresses, laid out in perfect proportion by Japanese specialists and featuring a beautiful and rare ginkgo tree. Patiño never actually lived here, as by the time the palace was complete he was based permanently overseas, and the building now houses the Instituto Cultural Simón I. Patiño, a charity set up in his name to promote education and literacy.

Cristo de la Concordia

About 1.5km east of the city centre, on the summit of the Serrania de San Pedro, stands the **Cristo de la Concordia**, a monumental statue of Christ with arms outstretched overlooking the city. The statue was modelled on the more famous Christ figure that looms over Río de Janeiro in Brazil but, as Cochabambinos will proudly tell you, it's just that little bit taller, measuring over 34m (40m, if you include the pedestal), and is thus the tallest statue in South America. Towering high above the city and weighing over 2000 tons, by Bolivian standards it's a truly massive monument, and even if this sort of thing doesn't impress you, it's worth going up for the view.

From a station at the eastern end of Avenida Las Heroínas, a modern **cable car** (*teleférico*; Tue–Sun 10am–7pm, $0.25 each way) makes the five-minute journey to the top (the alternatives are a hard slog up the steps at the end of Avenida Heroinas or a more expensive taxi ride). A visit to the foot of the Cristo is popular with locals, particularly at weekends, but it never gets too crowded and is usually fairly peaceful. The **views** of the city and surrounding valley from the base of the statue are splendid, and on weekends you can climb up the spiral staircase inside the hollow steel figure for an even better panorama (Sat & Sun 10am–6.30pm; $0.15). There's also a small **café** where you can get snacks and cold drinks, and several stalls sell ice cream; others rent binoculars and telescopes if you want to study the view more closely.

Eating, drinking and nightlife

The best places **to eat** if you're on a tight budget are Cochabamba's many **markets**, in particular the Mercado Calatayud, on San Martín with Aroma, where you'll find local Cochabambino specialities like *picante de pollo* (chicken in a spicy sauce) or *silpancho* (a kind of breaded beef schnitzel) for about $1, as well as huge fruit juices, inexpensive breakfasts and delicious *empanadas* and *salteñas*, which in Cochabamba seem about twice as big as elsewhere in Bolivia and are served accompanied by a choice of half a dozen different sauces. Cochabambinos are generally adventurous eaters, and the choice of

restaurants in the city is broad, with some very good meals available at relatively low prices.

Cafés and restaurants

Café Frances Les Temps Modernes España with Colombia. Sophisticated French bar-café serving good coffee, imaginative mixed juices, sweet and savoury crepes, and various other snacks and pastries. Closed Sun.

La Cantonata España with Venezuela. Elegant and sophisticated restaurant serving good but rather overpriced Italian food to Cochabamba's wealthiest residents.

Caso de Campo Blvd Recoleta with Pando. An attractive, if somewhat tourist-oriented restaurant, serving upscale traditional fare around a pleasing central courtyard.

Eli's Pizza Express 25 de Mayo with Ecuador. No-nonsense US-style fast-food outlet with reasonably good pizza and a wide range of inexpensive hot snacks. Good value, though the neon lighting and plastic decor don't encourage a lengthy stay.

La Estancia Blvd Recoleta with Pando. Excellent Argentine barbecue restaurant serving generous portions of delicious grilled beef, chicken or fish accompanied by a massive salad bar, all for about $5 a head.

Gopal España with Ecuador. Inexpensive Hare Krishna wholefood restaurant serving up cheap and tasty vegetarian meals and snacks, including a filling set *almuerzo* for just under $1.50.

El Griego España with Venezuela. Inexpensive Greek-style restaurant serving tasty *gyros* accompanied by good Greek -salads or not-so-Greek spaghetti. Evenings only.

Heladería Dumbo Colombia between España and 25 de Mayo. Cochabamba branch of the nationwide restaurant chain, serving up tasty ice cream, inexpensive but unexciting main courses like steak or chicken, pastries, juices and snacks, and excellent-value American breakfasts. There's another branch on Av Ballivián near Plaza Colón.

Sucremanta Arce at Sucre. Popular restaurant specializing in traditional pork-based dishes from the Chuquisaca department (Sucre), including delicious *chorizo* (sausage) and *fritanga*, a thick, spicy stew. Open lunchtimes only. There's another branch on Avenida Ballivián.

Drinking and nightlife

Nightlife in Cochabamba is centred on three different districts, each catering to a distinct crowd. The wealthier Cochabambinos head to **Boulevard Recoleta**, just east of Plaza Anza, north of the Río Rocha at the top of Avenida Oquendo, about 1km from Plaza 14 de Septiembre. This pedestrianized street is lined with upmarket restaurants and fairly exclusive bars where jazz and expensive cocktails predominate. More straightforward and popular entertainment – cheap steakhouses, beer palaces with sport on big-screen TVs and soundsystems pumping out Latin pop music – can be found along **Avenida Ballivián** (also known as El Prado), just north of the city centre. Centred on the intersection of **España and Ecuador**, in the city centre, meanwhile, is a laid-back bohemian scene of small bars and cafés which is popular with Cochabamba's large student population. As elsewhere in Bolivia, many restaurants stay open late at weekends and double as bars, and in all three areas places go in and out of fashion very quickly – especially as the municipal authorities have a tendency to close down any nightclub where the city's young people appear to be having too much of a good time.

Casablanca 25 de Mayo with Ecuador. Trendy Hollywood-themed bar serving cold beer, good cocktails and massive salads and pasta dishes. The first-floor balcony is great for people-watching, and they also sometimes show classic films in an upstairs movie theatre.

Deep On the circle between Recoleta and Padilla. Currently the most popular nightclub in town.

Top Chopp Av Ballivián with Reza. Raucous lager palace pumping out loud Latin dance music and serving cheap cold beer and straightforward Bolivian food for about $2.50 a dish.

X-Presion Café Arte España with Venezuela. One of the nicer student bars and cafés on España. Occasionally offers live jazz in the evenings.

Moving on from Cochabamba

Almost all **long-distance buses**, including those **to La Paz**, **Oruro**, **Santa Cruz** and **Sucre**, depart from the bus terminal in the south of the city on Avenida Ayacucho, just south of Avenida Aroma; you can check departure times by calling the bus information kiosk (daily 6am–11pm; ⓣ155 or 04/4234600). Buses to Sucre travel by night; those to Santa Cruz leave either early in the morning or in the evening and travel along the faster and shorter asphalt-surfaced lowland road through the Chapare (unless the road is blocked by protesting coca-growers). If you want to travel along the slow but scenic highland route via Samaipata, the best way to do so is to take a bus to **Vallegrande** (see p.320), spend the night there, and then get another bus on to Santa Cruz. Expreso Guadelupe run buses to Vallegrande twice a week, usually on Wednesdays and Saturdays. Buses to the **Parque Nacional Torotoro** leave from the corner of Avenida 6 de Agosto and Avenida Republica at about 6am on Thursdays and Sundays, while frequent buses to **Villa Tunari** and other towns in the **Chapare** leave from around the intersection of Avenida Oquendo and Avenida 9 de Abril.

Cochabamba's **airport** (ⓣ04/4222846) has daily flights to La Paz, Santa Cruz, Tarija and Sucre, and less frequent connections to Cobija, Guayaramerín and Trinidad. The airline TAM Mercosur (not to be confused with the Bolivian military airline TAM) also flies internationally from Cochabamba to Asunción in Paraguay, Buenos Aires in Argentina, and São Paulo in Brazil.

Listings

Airlines AeroSur, Villaroel 105 ⓣ04/4400910; TAM Mercosur, Plazuela Constitución 879 ⓣ04/4520112.

Banks and exchange eFex, Plaza 14 de Septiembre, changes cash dollars and traveller's cheques. There are also plenty of ATMs in the city centre where you can withdraw cash in dollars or bolivianos on Visa or Mastercard, including the Banco Nacional de Bolivia, Jordán with Aguirre.

Bus information ⓣ155 or 04/4234600.

Camping equipment There's a good range on sale at Bazar Aventura, Bolívar with San Martín.

Car rental J. Barron's, Sucre E-0727 ⓣ04/4222774.

Doctor Clínica Belga, Antezana N-0457 ⓣ04/4231404.

Immigration For visa extensions, the *migración* office is a few kilometres' taxi ride northeast of town near Puente Muyrurni.

Internet access Internet cafés abound. One of the best is ENTEL Internet, Av Ayacucho with Achá (9am–midnight; $1 per hour).

Language classes Escuela Runawasi, Maurice Lefebvre N-0470, Villa Juan XXIII ⓣ04/4248923, ⓦwww.runawasi.org, offers Spanish and Quechua lessons at all levels, with intensive courses from about $125 a week. They can also arrange for students to stay with local families.

Laundry Superclean, 16 de Julio with Jordán, same-day service.

Post office Correo Central, Av Ayacucho with Av Heroínas.

Taxis La Rosa ⓣ04/4241190.

Telephone office ENTEL's main office is at Av Ayacucho with Achá, and there are plenty of card-operated phone booths around town.

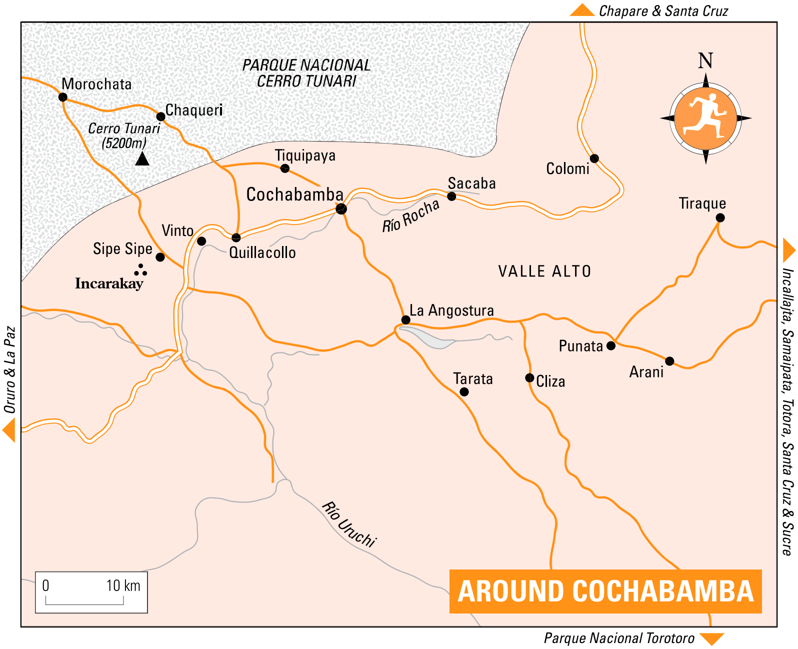
Tour operators The excellent and highly respected Fremen agency has its home base in Cochabamba at Tumulsa N-0245 (ⓣ04/4259392, ⓦwww.andes-amazonia.com). They offer a wide range of tailor-made tours throughout Bolivia, including river trips on the Río Mamoré (see p.360) on their own luxury floating hotel, the *Reina de Enín*. In the Cochabamba region, they run trips down into the Chapare (where they own the *Hotel El Puente* in Villa Tunari – see p.289), as well as city tours and visits to the market towns of the Valle Alto, to the Parque Nacional Torotoro, and to the ruins at Incarakay and Incallajta. They also run adventurous camping trips by motorized canoe into the Parque Nacional Isiboro-Sécure (see p.363), starting in the Chapare and ending in Trinidad. Other respected Cochabamba tour operators include Turismo Santa Rita, Buenos Aires 866 ⓣ04/4280305, ⓦwww.turismosantarita.com, and Collasuyo Tours, Ayacucho and Achá, ⓣ04/4511747, both of which run trips to most of the same regional destinations – city tours, Valle Alto, Incarakay and Incallajta, Torotoro and the Chapare.

Around Cochabamba

East of Cochabamba stretches the upper Cochabamba Valley – or **Valle Alto** – a densely populated agricultural region whose broad and well-irrigated fields of maize and wheat are amongst the most fertile and productive in the country. This region is dominated by small-scale but independent peasant farmers: though still Quechua-speaking, they're much more outward looking than the communities of the Altiplano, and played a key role in the emergence of radical peasant federations in Bolivia in the 1960s and 1970s.

Easily reached by regular micros from Cochabamba, the rural centres of **Cliza**, **Punata** and **Arani** all make interesting excursions from the city, especially during their weekly **markets**, bustling and strictly local agricultural when peasants from the surrounding districts come to buy supplies, sell produce, meet friends and drink *chicha*. The women wear the characteristic brightly coloured *pollera* skirts and white straw boaters of the Cochabamba Valley, and carry their goods on their backs in luridly striped machine-made shawls. The markets are rather prosaic compared to the more tourist-oriented market at Tarabuco (see p.268), and there's almost nothing in the way of handicrafts on sale, but it's still interesting to watch the energetic scenes, as people haggle over great piles of fruit and vegetables, live sheep and cattle, and cheap manufactured clothes. The liveliest markets are on Thursday in Arani, about 55km from Cochabamba, and on Sundays in Cliza, about 40km away. The Tuesday market in Punata, 45km from Cochabamba, is smaller, but the town is famed as home to the best *chicha* in all Bolivia.

Micros to Arani (every 15min; 45min) and Punata (every 30min; 40min) leave from the corner of Avenida Republica and Calle Manuripi in Cochabamba; those for Cliza (every 10–15min; 25min) leave from the corner of Avenida Barrientos and Manuripi.


Chapare & Santa Cruz
PARQUE NACIONAL
CERRO TUNARI
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Morochata
Chaqueri
Cerro Tunari
(5200m)
Tiquipaya
Colomi
Cochabamba
Sacaba
Río Rocha
Tiraque
Vinto
Quillacollo
Sipe Sipe
Incarakay
VALLE ALTO
La Angostura
Punata
Arani
Tarata
Cliza
Oruro & La Paz
Incallajta, Samaipata, Totora, Santa Cruz & Sucre
Río Uruchi
0
10 km
AROUND COCHABAMBA
Parque Nacional Torotoro

▲ Hats for sale in the Valle Alto

Parque Nacional Cerro Tunari

Immediately north of Cochabamba, some 3000 square kilometres of the Cordillera Tunari – the mountain range that forms the northern boundary of the Cochabamba Valley – is protected by **Parque Nacional Cerro Tunari**. Named after the tallest peak in the region, the 5200-metre Cerro Tunari, the park was set up primarily to protect the forested watershed that provides the irrigation water that is vital to the agriculture of the Cochabamba Valley, and to conserve rare high-altitude queñua forests which are home to the Cochabamba mountain finch, which is found nowhere else in the world.

Given its proximity to the city and the heavily settled Cochabamba valley, the park's ecosystems are in a far from pristine condition; the lower slopes closest to Cochabamba in particular are affected by illegal building. It's easy to visit from the city, however, and is popular amongst Cochabambinos at weekends. To reach the most accessible section of the park, immediately above Cochabamba, take trufi #103, which heads along Avenida Ayacucho to the park gate, about 7km north of the city centre. From the gate, a track climbs steeply up into the park; an hour or so's walk (or a short drive) will bring you to a series of picnic sites and children's playgrounds under the shade of cool eucalyptus groves where Cochabambinos like to relax around a barbecue, enjoy the views of the city in the valley below, and stroll or ride mountain bikes along the various tracks and trails. If you continue walking uphill for two to three hours you'll reach a series of small lakes from which the views are even more spectacular.

To get into the higher reaches of the park and climb the peak of **Cerro Tunari** itself, you'll need to take a micro early in the morning to Quillacollo (see p.282) and then catch another micro from Quillacollo towards the rural

Fiesta de la Virgen de Urkupiña

Every year for three days around August 15, Quillacollo hosts the **Fiesta de la Virgen de Urkupiña**, which attracts up to half a million visitors and involves a massive parade of costumed folkloric dancers from all over Bolivia, as well as the usual copious eating and drinking intertwined with sincere expressions of spiritual faith – many pilgrims walk to Quillacollo by night from Cochabamba as a sign of religious devotion. The fiesta dates back to the early nineteenth century, when a local Quechua-speaking shepherdess had repeated visions of the Virgin Mary on the nearby hill of **Cerro Cota**. When the villagers of Quillacollo investigated, they saw a brief glimpse of the Virgin ascending to heaven, and later found a carved image of her hidden among the rocks. This was carried to the parish church of San Idelfonsino, and soon credited with numerous miracles. The name Urkupiña is derived from the Quechua for "on the mountain" – the shepherdess's cry when she pointed out the Virgin to the villagers.

As with most major Bolivian religious fiestas, however, there's little doubt that its true origins lie deep in the pre-Christian past. Significant pre-Hispanic burial sites have been uncovered in the centre of Quillacollo, and the town's name means "**mountain of the moon**" in Quechua – the Incas considered the moon to be a major female deity, and following the Spanish conquest it was often conflated with the Virgin Mary. As well as the procession and dances (themselves a feature of most Inca celebrations), a central feature of the fiesta is a visit to the rocky outcrop where the Virgin appeared, during which tourists and pilgrims alike hack lumps of rock from the sacred mountain to take home with them in the belief that this will ensure health and material prosperity. They also make libations of coca and alcohol and burn candles, offerings associated with the Andean earth goddess Pachamama. As in the fiesta of Alasitas in La Paz (see p.97), pilgrims buy miniature replicas of objects they wish to possess – trucks, houses, university degrees, wads of fake dollars – in the belief that by doing so the real thing will be theirs before the year is out.

The best way **to visit** the fiesta is as a day-trip from Cochabamba, though you'll need to get to Quillacollo early in the morning to ensure a good spot from which to watch the dances. Be warned, too, that accommodation in Cochabamba can be hard to find during the fiesta.

town of Morochata (1 daily at about 7am), which lies north of Quillacollo on the other side of the Tunari range and the national park. You alight from the micro at the hamlet of **Chaqueri**, about 25km from Quillacollo at an altitude of 4200m, from where a path leads to the summit, a fairly straightforward four- to five-hour ascent, though you may need to ask locals for directions. The views from the peak are magnificent, with Cochabamba and the surrounding valley laid out far below and the shimmering peaks of the Cordillera Real far to the west visible on a clear day; condors are also a frequent sight. Transport back to Quillacollo passes by Chaqueri in the afternoon, but given the timing you'll need to camp overnight if you're doing the ascent independently – alternatively, you can do the trip with a Cochabamba-based tour agency, which will provide transport, guide and accommodation.

Quillacollo

About 15km west of Cochabamba, and now all but engulfed by the city's urban sprawl, is the bustling market town of **QUILLACOLLO**, the second-biggest settlement in the Cochabamba Valley. Reached by frequent micros from Avenida Aroma in Cochabamba (every 10min; 25min), it's a lively commercial centre and transport hub which is famous throughout Bolivia for its **Fiesta de la Virgen de Urkupiña** (see p.281), staged in August each year. Outside fiesta time, however, there's nothing much to see other than the reputedly miraculous but rather ordinary-looking image of the Virgen de Urkupiña herself, inside the modest Neoclassical Iglesia de San Idelfonsino a few blocks south of the main plaza. The town is also well known for the spicy food and heady brews available in its raucous *chicherías* (traditional restaurants serving *chicha*): the most famous is *Chernobyl*, named in honour of a particularly potent batch of *chicha* which was brewed shortly after the Ukrainian nuclear reactor exploded in 1986 – ask locals for directions.

Incarakay

Set high on the mountainside overlooking the Cochabamba Valley about 25km west of the city, the ruins of the Inca outpost of **Incarakay** make an excellent if rather strenuous day-trip from the city. To reach the ruins, take a micro from Avenida Aroma in Cochabamba to Quillacollo (every 10min; 25min), then another from Plaza Bolívar in Quillacollo to **Sipe Sipe** (every 15–20min; 20min), a peaceful agricultural town about 8km east of Quillacollo. From Sipe Sipe it's a steep two- to three-hour climb up to Incarakay; the route is fairly easy to find on your own, though if in doubt you can always ask directions from the locals. From the southwest corner of the plaza in Sipe Sipe, follow the road that heads out of town towards the mountainside. About 1km from the plaza, the road crosses a stream and turns sharply to the left; about 160m further on, just past a gully, a path climbs from the right-hand side of the road up to the ruins. The path is indistinct, but if you keep climbing towards the southwest the ruins will eventually become visible above you.

The **site** itself is fairly small, a collection of a dozen or so buildings made of rough- cut stones with the trapezoidal internal niches and doorways and earthquake-resistant inward-leaning walls characteristic of Inca architecture. What really impresses, however, is the setting: perched on the mountainside at an altitude of 3200m, Incarakay enjoys fantastic views over Cochabamba to Cerro Tunari, which soars imperiously to the north. From up here, the flat expanse of the Cochabamba Valley with its neatly irrigated green fields of maize seems a vision of order and fertility in contrast to the harsh, arid mountain ranges on either side.

It's not certain quite what purpose Incarakay served, but it seems likely that it was some kind of imperial administration centre. The Incas invested great energy in the Cochabamba Valley after they conquered the region in the mid-fifteenth century, bringing in agricultural settlers from other parts of the empire to cultivate the maize which fed the Inca armies, and this would seem a perfect site from which to calculate how much the imperial share of the harvest should amount to each year. On the return journey it's well worth stopping off in Sipe Sipe to sample some *chicha*, the fermented maize beer that was sacred to the Incas and which is still produced and consumed in large quantities in the Cochabamba Valley: served from huge earthenware pots and drunk from gourds, it's particularly refreshing after a long day walking in the sun. You'll find it on sale in a number of private houses, marked by a white flag or bunch of flowers raised on a pole outside.

Incallajta

The other major Inca site in the Cochabamba region is **Incallajta**, a far more substantial complex about 143km east of Cochabamba, which was built as a military outpost to protect the valley from raids by the unconquered Chiriguano tribes of the eastern lowlands. Incallajta is about 15km off the road to Sucre, just south of the point where it joins the old highland road between Cochabamba and Santa Cruz. Unless you rent a 4WD, the easiest way to visit the site is with a Cochabamba-based tour agency – a day-trip should cost about $70 per person for a group of four people. Reaching Incallajta by public transport is very difficult: you'll have to catch a bus from Cochabamba heading to Totora as far as the turn-off at the village of **Collpa**, then walk 15km to the ruins and spend the night there before returning the next day. There are good camping spots at the ruins and water is available, but you'll have to take all the food you need with you.

Totora

The road **from Cochabamba to Sucre**, 366km to the southeast, passes through a scenic region of rugged mountains and fertile valleys, but unfortunately all public transport between the two travels overnight (allowing Bolivians to make trips between the two without splashing out on accommodation), so unless you've got your own transport, you're unlikely to see much. The road also passes through what was until recently one of the prettiest colonial villages in Bolivia – **Totora**. Sadly, the village was devastated by a powerful earthquake that shook the region in 1998, but after a lengthy corruption-plagued reconstruction effort it has finally regained much of its original charm. The entirely, and generally faithfully, rebuilt central plaza offers a unique opportunity to experience the colonial plaza much the way it would have looked at the height of Spanish rule. While it is possible to get off one of the through buses in the middle of the night, it is really much better to visit Totora on a day-trip from Cochabamba. Micros leave from Avenida 6 de Agosto and República between 1pm and 4pm (3hrs, $1.25) as well as shared taxis which depart all day, shave an hour from the journey, and only cost a dollar more each way. If you want to spend the night, the unmarked *Hostal Colonial*, just uphill from the central plaza (no phone; ①), is a charming but basic option.

Parque Nacional Torotoro

Some 130km south of Cochabamba, **PARQUE NACIONAL TOROTORO** protects a remote and sparsely inhabited stretch of the arid, scrubby landscape which is characteristic of the eastern foothills and valleys of the Andes.

Covering just 164 square kilometres around the small town of the same name, Torotoro is Bolivia's smallest national park, but what it lacks in size it makes up for with its powerful scenery and varied attractions. The park encompasses a high, hanging valley and deep eroded canyons, ringed by low mountains whose twisted geological formations are strewn with fossils, dinosaur footprints and labyrinthine limestone cave complexes. In addition, the park's cactus and scrubby woodland supports considerable wildlife – including flocks of parakeets and the rare and beautiful red-fronted macaw, found only in this particular region of Bolivia – while ancient rock paintings and pre-Inca ruins reveal a long-standing human presence. The main attractions are the limestone caves of **Umajallanta**, the beautiful, waterfall-filled **Torotoro Canyon**, and hiking expeditions to the pre-Inca ruined fortress of **Llama Chaqui**.

Though reached from Cochabamba, Parque Nacional Torotoro actually lies within Northern Potosí department, a region famous within Bolivia as a repository of traditional Andean culture and society. Before the Spanish conquest this was the core territory of the **Charcas Confederation**, a powerful collection of different ethnic groups subject to Inca rule. Following the conquest, the different Quechua- and Aymara-speaking groups that made up the confederation retained their distinct identities, each as separate *ayllus* – an Andean term for an extended kinship group, made up of a few thousand members and similar to a clan or tribe. The *ayllus* of Northern Potosí – Laymis, Jukumanis, Machas, Pocoatas, Chayantakas – mostly live in the higher-altitude lands to the west of the region, where they grow potatoes and raise sheep, llamas and other livestock, but they maintain islands of territory in the dry valleys such as Torotoro, where they cultivate maize, wheat and other lower-altitude crops. They travel frequently between the two, and depending on the time of year you may see individuals in their distinctive brightly embroidered shirts coming down to tend the crops or long llama-trains carrying produce from the Torotoro valley up to the highlands. This system of widely dispersed territories ensures that each ethnic group has access to the produce of different altitudes, and represents a distinctly Andean form of organization that has long fascinated anthropologists.

Throughout the colonial era and long after independence, Northern Potosí was the focus of frequent indigenous uprisings as the different *ayllus* resisted attempts by Spanish and Bolivian hacienda owners to occupy their lands. The town of Torotoro itself was only founded in the late colonial period by mestizo migrants from Cochabamba. As recently as 1958, during the upheaval following the revolution of 1952, it was ransacked by armed *ayllu* members, who drove away many of the townspeople and seized the lands of the haciendas that had been established on their traditional valley territories.

Torotoro village and around

The administrative centre of the park and the only base from which to explore it is the village of **TOROTORO**, a sleepy collection of adobe houses with sagging red-tiled roofs set around a small plaza with an incongruous modern church – the only building in town that enjoys regular electric light (the village has a generator, but rarely enough funds for diesel). Home to just a few hundred people, the village stands beside the river of the same name at the top of a broad hanging valley at an altitude of about 2600m and is the place to find food, accommodation, guides and information (see "Practicalities", p.286). Torotoro's main annual celebration is the **Fiesta de Tata Santiago**, held on July 25 each year, when the *ayllus* descend on the town to drink, dance and stage ritual Tinku fights (see p.220).

The clearest **dinosaur tracks** in the park are on the lower slopes of Cerro Huayllas, the mountain that rises just east of the village across the Río Torotoro (which is generally little more than a stream in the May–Sept dry season). To reach them, walk back along the road to Cochabamba and cross at the ford, turn right and walk upstream about 100m, then climb about 20m up the rocky slope to your left. The tracks were made by a quadruped herbivore that roamed the region in the Cretaceous era, more than sixty million years ago – they comprise a trail of deep circular prints about 50cm in diameter imprinted in a sloping plane of grey rock and set about 1m apart. A little further upstream there's another trail of smaller prints left by a three-toed carnivore, but these are less distinct and much more difficult to find.

If you follow the river downstream for about twenty minutes you'll reach a stretch where the rushing rainy-season waters have carved great stone basins out of the soft bedrock – locals refer to this stretch as **Batea Cocha** ("beating pool"), as they look a bit like basins for pounding laundry. About 7m up the rock face on the left bank, protected by a low adobe wall to stop casual vandalism, but clearly visible nonetheless, is a collection of ancient **rock paintings** (*pinturas rupestres*). Mostly abstract designs painted in red ochre, with several zigzags – including one that looks like a serpent and another that could be the sun or a star – the paintings are all less than 1m long and have already been partly defaced, but they provide a focus for what is anyway a pleasant stroll down the river. A little further downstream there's a small but pretty **waterfall** that forms a good swimming hole; beyond that, the river plunges down into the deep Torotoro Canyon and you can walk no further, though you can access the canyon from further downstream (see below).

Torotoro Canyon

Just north of Torotoro village the Río Torotoro plunges through the deep **Torotoro Canyon**, probably the most beautiful section of the park. Enclosed on either side by sheer, 200-metre-high cliffs covered with stunted trees festooned with spiky bromeliads, the river creates a series of waterfalls as it tumbles over a jumble of massive boulders, forming pools that are ideal for swimming. The rock-strewn canyon floor is perfect for scrambling over boulders, and the route down is easy to find without a guide (though you shouldn't go alone in case you hurt yourself and can't get back).

To get down into the canyon, follow the road out of town towards Cochabamba for about 200m. Where the road turns sharply to the right, follow the track heading off to the left, and walk for about twenty minutes until you see some well-made stone steps dropping steeply down the side of the canyon to your left. The most picturesque stretch of the canyon is a few hundred metres downstream from where the steps reach the bottom, where a ten-metre-high waterfall known as **El Vergel** emerges from the side of the canyon on the right in several streams which cover the rock face in slimy-green water weeds – hence its Quechua name, Waca Senq'a, meaning "the cow's nose".

Caverna de Umajallanta

The most extensive and easiest to visit of the many limestone cave systems in the park is the **Caverna de Umajallanta**, where nearly 5km of underground passages have been explored. The cave makes a great day-trip from Torotoro and is one of the park's most popular attractions. The entrance to the cave is about 8km northwest of Torotoro, a walk of ninety minutes to two hours across the rolling landscape with good views of the dramatic geology of the mountain ridges that surround the Torotoro valley – about halfway you'll pass a trail of **dinosaur footprints**: a series of four-toed tracks about 30cm in length and about 1m apart.

The cave complex was formed by the waters of the Río Umajallanta, which disappears below the surface here and re-emerges as a waterfall high above the Torotoro Canyon, 6km away to the east. It consists of a series of interconnected limestone caverns of varying sizes, one of which contains a lake fed by the river that is home to some blind white fish. Sadly, most of the stalactites and stalagmites have been broken off by visitors in the years before protective measures were established (they should grow back in a few centuries), but a visit to the cave is still very enjoyable, unless you're claustrophobic – trips involve clambering and crawling for a couple of hours through some very tight places up to 800m underground. Take a torch and drinking water, expect to get dirty, and on no account attempt to visit the caves without a guide. For serious cavers and speleologists there are a number of other caves in the area to explore – talk to staff at the park office.

Llama Chaqui

About 16km east of Torotoro stands **Llama Chaqui**, a ruined pre-Inca fortress that energetic hikers can visit in a long day-trip from the village, or less hardy walkers could explore in a more leisurely two-day camping trip. Either way, you'll need a guide to find the route. The walk to the ruins takes you over the mountains to the east of the Río Torotoro, with spectacular views across the deep valley of the Río Caine and the rugged brown mountains that march away to Cerro Tunari, the peak that rises above Cochabamba. The scenery is very beautiful, with steep rocky slopes and narrow hanging valleys patchworked with maize and barley fields set around the occasional isolated hamlet.

Set on a knife-edge ridge high above the Río Caine, Llama Chaqui itself is an excellent observation point and natural fortress, though other than the walled enclosure (still sometimes used by local campesinos as a cattle pen) little remains of the ancient settlement, and the entire complex is heavily overgrown with thick vegetation. Even so, you can still make out the foundations of individual houses, and the ground is scattered with pottery fragments and rough-cut stones.

Practicalities

Buses to Torotoro leave Cochabamba from the corner of Avenida 6 de Agosto and Avenida Republica at about 6am on Thursdays and Sundays, and return from Torotoro at 6am on Fridays and Mondays, so you can either spend three or four whole days in the park – two days are enough to see the main attractions (the Torotoro Canyon, Caverna de Umajallanta and the dinosaur footprints) though it's worth taking four if you want to explore the area more fully. The bus ride lasts about seven hours in the dry season, a rough and dusty trip along unpaved roads and dry riverbeds – in the rainy season it takes much longer and the route can become impassable when rivers are too high to cross.

On arrival you should head to the **tourist office** (daily 8am–noon & 2–5pm), on the main street of the village, where you'll need to pay the $2.50 park admission fee. The office has basic information about the park and can find you a local **guide** for about $7 a day for groups of up to five people (slightly more for larger groups) – the village is so small that forming a group with other travellers is rarely a problem if you want to share the cost. There's usually only one **place to stay**, the *Alojamiento Charcas* (☎04/4133927; ①), which has plenty of simple but clean rooms with shared toilet and shower, though there's no hot water and rarely any electricity (the only phone in town, an ENTEL public phone, is also here. There are a couple of other similar *alojamientos* that open up very occasionally if things get really busy. Torotoro doesn't have any real restaurants, but a couple of women in the village prepare basic **meals** for about $1 if you order a few hours in advance – just ask around to find out who's cooking. Otherwise, there is a handful of basic shops where you can get bread, tins of sardines, crackers, oranges, soft drinks and other simple provisions, as well as tea and coffee, though it's worth bringing some supplies with you from Cochabamba to supplement this rather meagre fare, particularly if you're planning a longer stay.

The Chapare

Northeast of Cochabamba, the main road to Santa Cruz crosses the last ridge of the Andes and drops down into the **CHAPARE**, a broad, rainforest-covered plain in the Upper Amazon Basin which has been heavily settled by peasant migrants from the highlands, who over the last few decades have turned the region into the main source in Bolivia of coca grown to manufacture **cocaine**. For the traveller, the ongoing conflict between local coca farmers and Bolivian government troops means that despite its great natural beauty the Chapare is not the place for expeditions far off the beaten track – you're likely to be mistaken for a US agent or a narco-trafficker. For all the region's troubles, however, the towns along the main Cochabamba to Santa Cruz road are peaceful and safe to visit – at least when the road isn't blocked by protesting *cocaleros* – though most are unattractive and economically depressed frontier settlements, serving as functional market centres for a sadly deforested hinterland. The exception is **Villa Tunari**, a one-time narco-traffickers, playground which is now at the

▲ Spreading coca leaves in the Chapare

centre of efforts to promote the Chapare as a tourist destination. The town is a good place to break a journey between Cochabamba and Santa Cruz and also to get a brief introduction to the Amazon lowlands – the well-preserved rainforests of the **Parque Nacional Carrasco** are within easy reach, and the town enjoys a beautiful setting and is a good place to relax. Otherwise, the main point of stopping in the Chapare is to make the exciting river trip from **Puerto Villarroel**, the region's main port, north to Trinidad in the Beni.

Villa Tunari and around

The paved road through the Chapare between Cochabamba and Santa Cruz was completed in the 1970s, replacing the longer highland road via Samaipata (see p.278) as the main route between the two cities. From Cochabamba, it climbs slowly through high-valley scenery, past mountain slopes patchworked with wheat and potato fields and groves of eucalyptus and pine. About 90km from Cochabamba the road passes **Laguna Corani**, a large artificial lake that provides much of Cochabamba's water supply, before crossing the last ridge of the Andes and plunging down into the Chapare. Almost immediately the vegetation closes in on either side of the road as it winds down through dense cloudforest that clings to the steep mountainside, its trees bearded with lichen and covered with spiky bromeliads that thrive on the moisture brought by great banks of cloud that sweep in from the north. On the way down, you'll pass a major road block where soldiers and UMOPAR anti-narcotics police search passing vehicles for cocaine going out and precursor chemicals (ether and sulphuric acid) for its manufacture coming in – you'll be asked to get off the bus and may have to show your passport.

About 160km from Cochabamba, the road reaches the town of **VILLA TUNARI**, the biggest settlement in the Chapare and the centre of efforts to develop the region as a tourist destination. Set beside a broad sweep of the Río San Mateo, with the last forested foothills of the Andes rising behind, Villa Tunari is extremely picturesque, and at an altitude of just 300m enjoys a warm, tropical climate. Its chances of becoming a successful resort or an ecotourism destination like Rurrenabaque, however, are severely limited so long as the current instability continues, and independent travel off the beaten track remains inadvisable. This is a shame, as from Puerto San Francisco, an hour's drive north of Villa Tunari, you could rent a motorized canoe and boatman to take you down the Ríos Chipiriri and Isiboro into the rainforests of the Parque Nacional Isiboro-Sécure (see p.363), but though the Cochabamba-based tour agency Fremen occasionally run trips along this route, doing so independently is not a safe proposition at present.

The main road through the town is lined with large restaurants and overpriced hotels where in better days the movers and shakers of the cocaine industry would come to blow some of their massive earnings, but which now depend for custom on drug enforcement officials, the occasional weekender from Cochabamba and foreign development workers. Away from the main road Villa Tunari is a pleasant, laid-back town which has clearly seen better days. Broad, cobbled streets lined with profuse gardens and houses that are fairly luxurious by Bolivian standards lead off a spacious main square, surrounded by modern public buildings including the offices of the United Nations and other international aid agencies. Municipal efforts to promote tourism as an economic alternative to coca and cocaine have so far resulted in little more than an expensive sign across the main road proclaiming Villa Tunari a "Paraíso Etno-Ecoturistico".

A 250-metre walk east along the main road and across the bridge over the Río Espirito Santo brings you to the entrance of the **Parque Machia** (Mon–Sat 9.30am–5.30pm; $1, cameras $2, video cameras $3), a small, private ecological reserve that also serves as a refuge for Amazonian animals rescued from captivity. The park has 4km of trails running through the forest and some lookout points with beautiful views across the Río Chapare and the forest-covered mountains rising to the high peaks of the Andes behind. Along the trails you'll meet most of the semi-tame animal residents, which include several species of monkey, macaws and a puma, many of which roam free but still depend on humans for food. The park and refuge are managed by the **Inti Wara Yassi** organization (ⓣ04/4136572, ⓦwww.intiwarayassi.org), which relies largely on volunteers, many of them young foreign travellers who stop here for a month or two. Volunteers must stay for a minimum of fifteen days and can sleep in the Casa de Voluntarios dormitory for about $4 a night.

Practicalities

Most services in Villa Tunari are strung out along the Cochabamba–Santa Cruz road; the main plaza is two blocks north of this opposite the *Hotel Las Palmas*. The Banco Union has an ATM that accepts Visa and Mastercard. **Buses** from Cochabamba arrive and depart from the office of Trans Tours 7 de Junio on the main road; you can also flag down buses passing through on their way to Cochabamba from elsewhere in the Chapare. Through buses from Santa Cruz will drop you off at the police control *tranca* at the west end of town, and buses heading to Santa Cruz sometimes pick up passengers here if they have room, though most pass through in the middle of the night. To travel to Ivirgarzama and thence to Puerto Villarroel, you'll need first to take a trufi to Shinaota (every 20–30min; 20min), which trawl up and down the main road in search of passengers, then take another trufi from Shinaota to Chimoré, and then a third from Chimoré to Ivirgarzama.

The best **place to stay** is the *Hotel El Puente* (book through Fremen in Cochabamba on ⓣ04/4259392; ⑤, including breakfast), about 4km east of town, which has modern, comfortable *cabañas* for two people with fans and hot water set amid a patch of rainforest with a swimming pool and several natural river pools close by, and a restaurant. To get there either take a taxi ($2–3) or walk out of town along the main road to the east, then take the track that leads off it to the right after the second bridge. On the south side of the main road are a couple of rather overpriced mid-range country club-style hotels with small swimming pools: the *Hotel Las Palmas* (ⓣ04/4136501; ⑤) has comfortable but rather run-down rooms with fans and private baths, some with views over the river, and a good restaurant, while the *Hotel San Martín* (ⓣ04/4136512; ④) has cool modern rooms with fans and private baths around an exuberant garden. The best budget option is the *Hotel La Querencia* (no phone; ②), a block north of the main road on the last turning before the bridge at the east end of town, which has simple but clean rooms with private or shared bathrooms and cold water only; some have views over the river.

The best **restaurant** in town is the *San Silvestre*, on the main road, where for about $4 you can get excellent local river fish including the delicious *surubí* and a range of game dishes including *jochi* (agouti) and *taitetú* (peccary or wild pig), if your ecological conscience allows, as well as cold beer and a range of freshly squeezed exotic fruits. The restaurant in the *Hotel Las Palmas* serves much the same stuff for similar prices, as well as decent coffee and breakfasts. Less expensive food is available from the foodstalls and shacks along the north side of the main road, which cater mostly for passing lorry drivers and bus passengers; here you'll find filling set *almuerzos* for around $1, as well as inexpensive fried fish and steak, fruit juices and cold drinks.

Parque Nacional Carrasco

A few kilometres south of Villa Tunari on the other side of the Río San Mateo, some 6226 square kilometres of the forested northern slopes of the Andes are protected by **PARQUE NACIONAL CARRASCO**, which adjoins the Parque Nacional Amboró (see p.311) to the east. Plunging steeply down from high mountain peaks, the park encompasses a variety of ecosystems from high Andean grasslands and cloudforest to dense tropical rainforest, ranging in altitude from 4000m to just 300m. It also supports a great range of wildlife, including all the major Amazonian mammals, among them jaguar, tapir and peccary, and over 700 species of bird, including several which are endemic to the region. The park is seriously threatened by illegal logging, hunting and forest clearance for agriculture by settlers along both its northern and southern margins, but the mountainous and forest-covered landscape is so impenetrable that the inner regions remain pristine – there are even uncomfirmed reports of uncontacted groups of indigenous Yuracaré hunters living deep in the interior of the park.

Close to Villa Tunari on the southern border of the park are the **Cavernas del Repechón** (all days, $2); a group of natural caves that are home to a large population of *guacharós*, or **oil birds**, a large nocturnal fruit-eating bird found in very few other places in South America. To visit the caves you'll need to reach the settlement of **Paractito**, about 10km from Villa Tunari on a side road heading south off the main road just east of town – a taxi should cost about $4–5, twice that if you want the driver to wait around for a few hours and take you back after your visit. At Paractito the park guards will collect your entrance fee and take you across the tumultuous Río San Mateo on a primitive cable car. Visits to the cave are by guided tour only, so it's best to arrive early to ensure you don't miss the park guards when they set off. From the other side of the river it's a thirty-minute walk through the rainforest to the caves, where you'll be able to see (and hear) the oil birds nesting (except in May and June, when they often migrate to Venezuela). The birds only leave the caves at night to eat fruit, and navigate by echolocation, emitting a strange clicking sound.

East from Villa Tunari to Santa Cruz

From Villa Tunari **the road to Santa Cruz** continues east across a flat, heavily settled and largely deforested landscape punctuated with regular towns strung out along the main road – scruffy, tin-roofed frontier settlements where satellite dishes preceded sanitation, and whose unpaved streets turn to quagmires in the rain. The first of these is **SHINAOTA**, which was the centre of the cocaine trade in the early 1980s and one of the most expensive towns in Bolivia, a place where huge quantities of cocaine and coca paste were bought and sold openly on the streets like so much sugar. Those days are long gone now, however, and little of the money made was reinvested in the town. Whatever trade still goes on is conducted in secrecy deeper in the forest to the north, and Shinaota has the melancholy feeling of a gold-rush town after the gold has run out. Trufis to and from Villa Tunari (every 20–30min; 20min) and Ivirgarzama (every 20–30min; 35min) arrive and depart from the main street, where you can also catch buses direct to Cochabamba; there are a few restaurants and a couple of *alojamientos*, but no reason to spend the night.

Just east of Shinaota, 35km from Villa Tunari, the town of **CHIMORÉ** is the headquarters of drug-eradication efforts in the Chapare, and the road passes several major military and police bases, fenced and fortified compounds from which the Bolivian joint task force and US Drug Enforcement Agency helicopters sally forth each day in search of coca plantations to uproot and clandestine cocaine kitchens to raid. Another 29km further east along the Chapare road, the unappealing market centre of **IVIRGARZAMA** has little to distinguish it from other Chapare towns apart from the fact that it's from here that a side road leads north to Puerto Villarroel, from where you can travel by boat to Trinidad in the Beni. Trufis to Shinaota and buses to Cochabamba leave from one end of the main street, trufis to Puerto Villarroel (every 20–30min; 30min) from the other, and there is a handful of places to eat and some basic *alojamientos*, but no reason to stay.

From Ivirgarzama the main road continues east to Santa Cruz, 247km away, passing through **Buena Vista** (141km), the main entrance point to the Parque Nacional Amboró (see p.311). Most buses to Santa Cruz pass through by night, but will usually stop for passengers if they have spare seats.

Puerto Villarroel and the Río Ichilo

From Ivirgarzama, a rough dirt road runs 26km north to **PUERTO VILLARROEL**, a small river port on the **Río Ichilo** from where regular cargo boats travel north to Trinidad (see p.354). This river route is the main transport link between Cochabamba department and the Beni, and was the only route between Trinidad and highland Bolivia until the road from Santa Cruz to Trinidad was completed in the 1970s. With a population of about 2000, Puerto Villarroel is an untidy collection of tin-roofed wooden and concrete houses, many of them raised above the muddy, unpaved streets to protect them from flooding when the river bursts its banks – a not infrequent occurrence in the November-to-March rainy season.

Trufis to Ivirgarzama arrive and depart from the small central plaza, where you'll find an ENTEL telephone office, a few restaurants selling cheap set *almuerzos* and tasty fried river fish, and a couple of basic **places to stay** – the friendly *Alojamiento Sucre* (no phone; ①), which has a few rooms off a big dancehall (which gets very noisy on the weekends when boatmen and *cocaleros* come to drink the night away); and the more peaceful *Alojamiento La Pascana* opposite (no phone; ①). Most activity takes place on the river bank, a couple of blocks away, where there's a naval base, a series of oil storage tanks, and a rudimentary port where ramshackle river boats line up to load and unload cargo – bananas and cattle arriving from downstream, gasoline to take down to Trinidad, basic supplies for the few settlements downriver.

To find a **boat** to take you downstream, ask around amongst the captains or in the Capitanía del Puerto (the naval port authority office). The river journey through the rainforest to Trinidad should cost about $20–30 including food and takes five to seven days, depending on the level of the river, the size and power of the boat, and how many stops it makes to load and unload cargo. In the dry season (May–Sept) river levels can drop so low that the trip downstream becomes impossible. During the rest of the year there are usually several departures to Trinidad each week, though you may have to wait around a day or two – boat captains generally let passengers sleep on board while waiting to load. You'll need your own hammock and mosquito nets (you can buy these in the markets in Cochabamba or Ivirgarzama), insect repellent and drinking water, and fruit and snacks to supplement the basic food supplied on board.

Travel details

Buses

Cochabamba to: La Paz (every 30min; 7–8hr): Oruro (every 20min; 4hr); Santa Cruz (8–12 daily; 10–12hr); Sucre (7–10 daily; 10–12hr); Vallegrande (2 weekly; 10–12hr); Villa Tunari (4–6 daily; 4–5hr).

Sucre to: Cochabamba (11–12 daily; 10–12hr); La Paz (4–5 daily; 15hr), Oruro (3–4 daily; 11hr); Potosí (every 30min; 3hr); Santa Cruz (10–12 daily; 14hr); Villamontes (daily; 20–25hr); Yacuiba (daily; 21–26hr).

Flights

Cochabamba to: La Paz (3–5 daily; 45min); Riberalta (1 daily; 1hr 30min); Santa Cruz (2-4 daily; 45min); Tarija (1 daily; 50min); Trinidad (2–3 daily; 40min).

Sucre to: La Paz (1 daily; 1hr); Santa Cruz (2–3 daily; 40min).

Boats

Puerto Villarroel to: Trinidad (2–3 weekly; 5–7 days).

5

Santa Cruz and the Eastern Lowlands

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BRAZIL
PERU
6
2
1
4
5
3
CHILE
PARAGUAY
ARGENTINA

CHAPTER 5

Highlights

- **Santa Cruz nightlife** Bolivia's sleepy eastern capital comes to life at night and in many ways is closer in style and spirit to Brazil than to the rest of the country. **See p.305**

- **Parque Nacional Amboró** The country's most easily accessible rainforest, boasting a spectacular abundance of birdlife, with more species than any other protected area in the world. **See p.311**

- **Samaipata** Charming town set in an idyllic valley with excellent hiking nearby, as well as the mysterious pre-Hispanic ceremonial site of El Fuerte. **See p.313**

- **The Che Guevara trail** Admirers of the iconic Argentine revolutionary can visit the site of his grave in Vallegrande, as well as the nearby hamlet of La Higuera, where his ill-fated guerrilla campaign ended in capture and execution. **See p.323**

- **The Jesuit Missions of Chiquitos** Scattered across the sparsely populated forest region east of Santa Cruz, the immaculately restored mission churches of Chiquitos are a reminder of one of the more unusual episodes in Bolivia's colonial history. **See p.325**

- **Parque Nacional Noel Kempff Mercado** Bolivia's most remote and spectacular national park, with abundant wildlife, pristine Amazonian rainforest and magnificent waterfalls tumbling down from the plateau that inspired Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Lost World*. **See p.338**

TU EJEMPLO ALUMBRA
NUEVO AMANECER

▲ Statue of Che Guevara, La Higuera

5

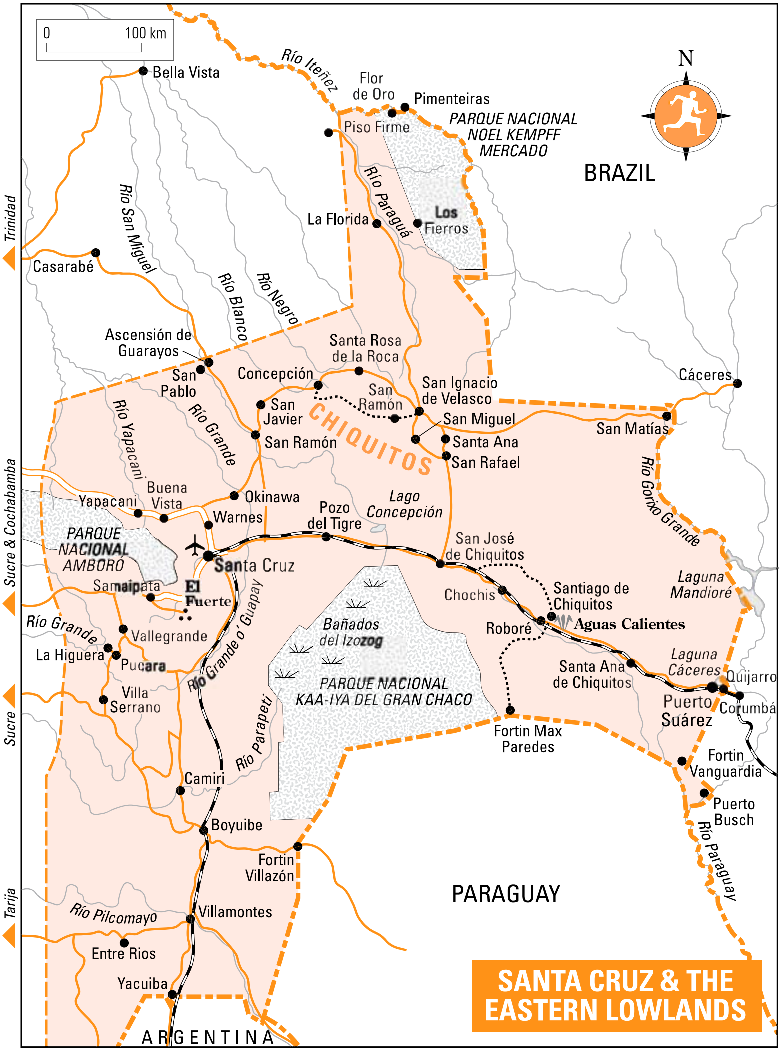
Santa Cruz and the Eastern Lowlands

Stretching from the last foothills of the Andes east to Brazil and south to Paraguay and Argentina, Bolivia's **Eastern Lowlands** – the Llanos Orientales – were until fairly recently amongst the least-known and least-developed regions in the country. Spread across a vast and sparsely populated plain, the lowlands' varied ecosystems range from Amazonian rainforest in the north, through broad savannahs and tropical dry forest in the centre, to the immense wetlands of the Pantanal in the far east and the arid scrub and thorn brush of the Chaco to the south. Rich in natural resources, in recent decades the region has undergone astonishingly rapid development, while its economy has grown to become the most important in the country, fuelled by oil and gas, cattle-ranching and massive agricultural development.

At the centre of this unprecedented economic boom is the city of **Santa Cruz**, the regional capital, which in the space of a few decades has been transformed from an isolated provincial backwater into a booming modern metropolis with a brash commercial attitude and lively tropical outlook utterly distinct from the reserved cities of the Bolivian highlands. Though Santa Cruz has little to offer in terms of conventional tourist attractions, it is a crucial transport hub and the ideal base for exploring the many attractions of the surrounding area, where much of the region's beautiful natural environment survives, despite the ravages of deforestation and development.

About 100km west of the city, the pristine and exceptionally biodiverse rainforests that cover the easternmost foothills of the Andes are protected by the **Parque Nacional Amboró**, one of the most easily accessible wilderness areas in Bolivia. The beautiful cloudforest that covers the upper regions of Amboró can be visited from **Samaipata**, an idyllic resort town that is also home to one of Bolivia's most intriguing pre-Inca archeological sites, El Fuerte. From Samaipata, you can also head further southwest through the Andean foothills to the town of **Vallegrande** and the nearby hamlet of **La Higuera**, scene of the last desperate guerrilla campaign of the iconic Argentine revolutionary Ernesto Che Guevara, who was killed here in 1967.

East of Santa Cruz the railway to Brazil passes through the broad forested plains of **Chiquitos**, whose beautiful Jesuit mission churches, built in the eighteenth century and recently restored, bear witness to one of the


0 100 km
N
Trinidad
Sucre & Cochabamba
Sucre
Tarija
BRAZIL
PARAGUAY
ARGENTINA
SANTA CRUZ & THE EASTERN LOWLANDS
Bella Vista
Río Iteñez
Flor de Oro
Pimenteiras
PARQUE NACIONAL NOEL KEMPFF MERCADO
Piso Firme
Río Paraguá
La Florida
Los Fierros
Casarabé
Río San Miguel
Río Blanco
Río Negro
Ascensión de Guarayos
San Pablo
Santa Rosa de la Roca
Concepción
San Ignacio de Velasco
San Ramón
San Javier
CHIQUITOS
San Miguel
Santa Ana
San Rafael
San Ramón
Cáceres
San Matías
Río Yapacani
Río Grande
Río Gorixo Grande
Buena Vista
Yapacani
Okinawa
Warnes
Pozo del Tigre
Lago Concepción
PARQUE NACIONAL AMBORÓ
Santa Cruz
San José de Chiquitos
Samaipata
El Fuerte
Río Grande o' Guapay
Chochis
Santiago de Chiquitos
Laguna Mandioré
Roboré
Aguas Calientes
Río Grande
Vallegrande
Bañados del Izozog
La Higuera
Pucara
Santa Ana de Chiquitos
Laguna Cáceres
Quijarro
Corumbá
Puerto Suárez
Villa Serrano
PARQUE NACIONAL KAA-IYA DEL GRAN CHACO
Río Parapeti
Fortin Max Paredes
Fortin Vanguardia
Camiri
Puerto Busch
Boyuibe
Fortin Villazón
Río Paraguay
Río Pilcomayo
Villamontes
Entre Rios
Yacuiba

most extraordinary episodes in Spanish colonial history, when a handful of priests established a semi-autonomous theocratic state in the midst of the wilderness. In the far north of the region, accessible only by air or by an arduous overland journey, the **Parque Nacional Noel Kempff Mercado** is perhaps the most beautiful and pristine of all Bolivia's protected rainforest areas, combining dramatic scenery with unparalleled wildlife-spotting opportunities. Finally, south of Santa Cruz stretches the vast and inhospitable **Chaco**, an arid wilderness of dense thorn and scrub, reaching south to Argentina and Paraguay.

Santa Cruz

Set among the steamy, tropical lowlands just beyond the last Andean foothills, the city of **SANTA CRUZ** has emerged in recent decades as the economic powerhouse of Bolivia. An isolated frontier town until the middle of the twentieth century, the city has grown in the last fifty years to become the second biggest in the country, a sprawling metropolis that now rivals La Paz for power and influence, with a booming economy based on oil and gas, timber and cattle, and large-scale agro-industry. Largely because most of it is so new, Santa Cruz has little to match the colonial charm of highland cities like Sucre and Potosí, and few conventional tourist sights beyond a few mediocre museums and an architecturally unexciting cathedral. But while some travellers find its brash modernity, commercialism and pseudo-Americanism unappealing, others enjoy its blend of dynamism and tropical insouciance, and the lively optimism of its inhabitants.

The city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra was founded in April 1561 by the Spanish conquistador **Nuflo de Chavez**, who had arrived in the region at the head of a large military expedition accompanied by thousands of indigenous Guaraní, having marched across the desolate plains of the Chaco from the Spanish settlement of Asunción on the Río Paraguay in search of new lands and a route through to the silver of the Andes. The original city stood some 260km east of its present location, close to the site of the later Jesuit mission town of San José de Chiquitos (see p.336). The new settlement proved isolated and precarious, however, surrounded by a hostile indigenous population and far from any other outpost of Spanish power. In 1594 it was moved to its present location, a more easily defended site on the west side of the Río Grande, close to the last foothills

Evo-lution

Santa Cruz has become something of a flash point for tension between the country's eastern and western halves. The Chaco area in the south of the Santa Cruz region is rich in natural gas and, as a result, Santa Cruz's economic output represents nearly a third of the country's GDP. However, much of its wealth is filtered off to La Paz and this has caused growing resentment amongst the Eastern provinces. Santa Cruz has become the central focus for rallying calls for greater autonomy and even independence. In 2006, President Evo Morales put the national gas industry under state control in an effort to share the proceeds with the impoverished, indigenous majority, rather than continue to line the pockets of a privileged few. The terms of nationalization, however, seriously jeopardised agreements with the area's much-needed foreign investors. Morales' dramatic land reform policy was also bitterly opposed by Santa Cruz landowners. He has proposed to redistribute 200,000 sq km of land (an area twice the size of Portugal) before the end of his Presidential term in 2011. Whilst much state-owned land has already been redistributed to help the nation's poor recover from historical injustice, he also plans to seize privately owned land which is unproductive, or was obtained illegally, and distribute that as well. Morales may be trying to right the wrongs of a colonial past but at the risk of polarizing the east and the west to a point of no return. At the time of writing, the *autonomia* movement was very evident in the city, with T-shirts, graffiti and green-and-white regional flags all bearing witness to the anti-government feeling. Tensions seem likely only to rise, as, in January, 2007, Morales promised even more radical reform that includes plans to encourage the speaking and learning of indigenous languages in schools and further nationalization of industry, including mineral processing plants.

of the Andes. For the next three and a half centuries Santa Cruz remained an isolated frontier outpost, all but cut off from the rest of Bolivia and Paraguay by great distances, inhospitable terrain and (at least until the last major Chiriguano uprising was crushed in 1892) unconquered indigenous groups.

Only in the 1950s did things begin to change, with the construction of a railway link to Brazil and a road to Cochabamba, after which Santa Cruz became the main supplier of cotton, rice, sugar, soy and other tropical agricultural produce to the rest of Bolivia (and, increasingly, to foreign markets as well). The economic boom really took off in the 1970s, when Santa Cruz emerged as the centre of the Bolivian **cocaine industry**. Cocaine brought enormous wealth – as well as corruption – to the city, much of which was reinvested in land, agriculture, construction and other legitimate businesses. Growth was further fuelled by oil and gas revenues from the Chaco, and generous government subsidies (often in the form of loans which were never repaid) to large landowners and agro-industrialists, particularly during the regime of General Banzer, himself a Cruceño. The population of Santa Cruz leapt from around 42,000 in 1950 to over one and a half million in 2006, making it the second-biggest city in Bolivia after La Paz. In May 2006 President Morales came through with his election promise to nationalise, or at least increase state control of, the foreign-owned oil fields and refineries to ensure that more revenue and jobs benefited Bolivia's poor. As Latin America's second-richest country in natural resources, the decision has caused shockwaves throughout the region, though it remains to be seen whether Bolivia has the capital and stability to make it work in the long-term.

Rapid economic growth and the availability of land attracted large numbers of immigrants to Santa Cruz, including Japanese rice farmers, German-speaking Mennonites from Canada and Mexico, and a small but influential group of fugitive Nazis. The Bolivian government actively encouraged immigration to the region: at one stage even offering white farmers from South Africa and Rhodesia "empty" land around Santa Cruz – the fact that these lands were in fact already occupied by the much-depleted indigenous groups who had always lived there was conveniently ignored, but in the end the offer was not taken up.

Most of the new arrivals, however, were poor indigenous migrants from the Andes, who settled in ever-expanding shantytowns around the city, transforming the make-up of the city's population. But for all that, it's still the native Cruceños who dominate the city and its economy. Known as *cambas* by the people of the highlands, the Cruceños are culturally a world apart from the rest of Bolivia (they in their turn refer with mild contempt to the highland immigrants as *collas* – the two terms being old Inca words for lowland and highland peoples respectively).

Generally loud, brash and happy-go-lucky, their language, music and outlook are infused with a tropical ease and sensuality which makes the city feel closer in spirit to Brazil or Colombia than to the rest of Bolivia.

Arrival and information

Santa Cruz is divided into concentric rings by successive ring roads – called **anillos** – beginning with the **Primer Anillo**, which encompasses the colonial city centre, and extending outwards to the ninth ring. Other than the airport, you'll find almost everything you're likely to need within the first two *anillos*; when travelling outside this central area you'll need to know which *anillo* you want when giving directions.

Long-distance buses and all **trains** arrive and depart from the **Terminal Bi-Modal de Transporte**, the combined bus and train terminal (ⓣ03/3463388 or 3463900) located about 2km west of the city centre just outside the Segundo Anillo at the end of Avenida Brasil. There are always plenty of taxis outside (a trip from here to most city hotels won't cost more than about $1); otherwise, you can get into the city centre by catching any micro heading east along Avenida Brasil and marked "Plaza 24 de Septiembre". Almost all buses and trufis travelling between Santa Cruz and destinations within the department of Santa Cruz arrive and depart from the Terminal Bi-Modal. Trufis from **Buena Vista** and **Yapacani** arrive and depart from near the old bus terminal, just south of the city centre; trufis from **Samaipata** arrive and depart from two blocks south of the old terminal on Avenida Omar Chavez with Solis de Olguín; and buses from the various former Jesuit mission towns of Chiquitos – **San Javier**, **Concepción** and **San Ignacio** – terminate at three different bus company offices inside the Segundo Anillo: Expreso Misiones (at Avenida Omar Chavez with Solis de Olguín); Linea 131 del Este (at Suàrez Arana with Barrón); and Expreso Jenecheru (at Choferes del Chaco with the Segundo Anillo). For getting around the city, **taxis** can be hailed on all the main streets; they charge a standard rate of just under $1 within the Primer Anillo, plus an additional boliviano for each extra *anillo* you cross.

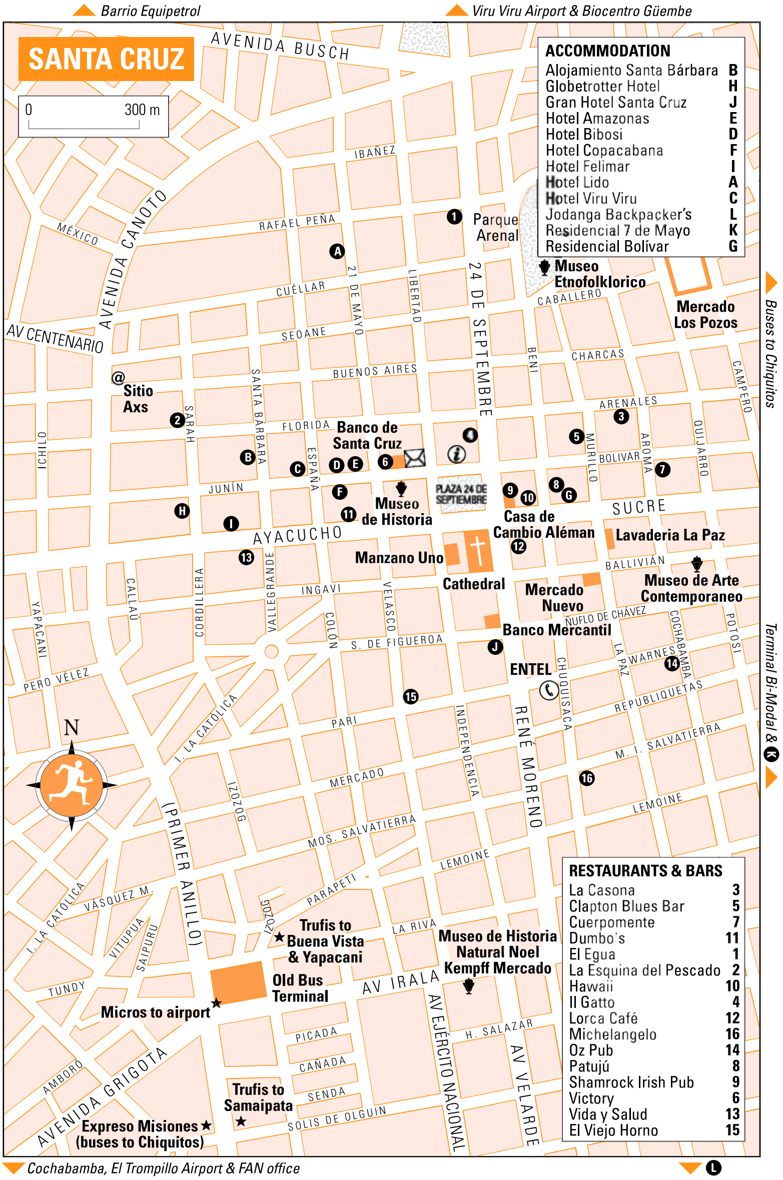
Santa Cruz's main airport is the modern **Aeropuerto Viru-Viru** (ⓣ03/3852400 or 181), 17km north of the city centre, from where it's a $6 flat-fare taxi ride into the centre of town; alternatively, you can catch a micro (every 20min; 30min) to the corner of avenidas Irala and Cañoto, outside the old bus terminal, though this still leaves you a fair walk from any city-centre accommodation. The city's second airport, the smaller **Aeropuerto El Trompillo**, is used by the military airline, TAM Mercosur, who operate weekly flights to San Ignacio.

Information

Santa Cruz's tourist information office, the **Unidad de Turismo** (Mon–Fri 8am–12.30pm and 2.30–8pm; also open weekends in high season ⓣ03/3368900), is inside the Prefectura building on the north side of Plaza 24 de Septiembre. You can usually get a good free map of the city and whatever flyers and brochures are currently available, and the staff will try to answer simple questions in Spanish, though their understanding of what independent foreign tourists might find interesting is limited. For information on the Parque Nacional Noel Kempff Mercado you could contact the office of the **Fundación Amigos de la Naturaleza** (FAN), 7km out of town on the old road to Cochabamba (ⓣ03/3556800, ⓦwww.fan-bo.org). However, FAN seems to be taking an increasingly low-profile role in the regulation and day-to-day running of National Parks, and tourist information is best found through tour agencies.

Accommodation

Possibly because building and running **luxury hotels** is a good way of investing and laundering dirty money, there's an oversupply of top-range accommodation in Santa Cruz. However, most of it is located in the outskirts of the city in the wealthy Barrio Equipetrol, which is useful if you're here on business but not much good if you want to explore the city. Fortunately, the majority of **mid-range** and **budget accommodation** is conveniently located in or close to the old city centre, from where most


SANTA CRUZ
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Barrio Equipetrol
Viru Viru Airport & Biocentro Güembe
Buses to Chiquitos
Terminal Bi-Modal & K
Cochababma, El Trompillo Airport & FAN office
L
ACCOMMODATION
Alojamiento Santa Bárbara B
Globetrotter Hotel H
Gran Hotel Santa Cruz J
Hotel Amazonas E
Hotel Bibosi D
Hotel Copacabana F
Hotel Felimar I
Hotel Lido A
Hotel Viru Viru C
Jodanga Backpacker's L
Residencial 7 de Mayo K
Residencial Bolívar G
RESTAURANTS & BARS
La Casona 3
Clapton Blues Bar 5
Cuerpomente 7
Dumbo's 11
El Egua 1
La Esquina del Pescado 2
Hawaii 10
Il Gatto 4
Lorca Café 12
Michelangelo 16
Oz Pub 14
Patujú 8
Shamrock Irish Pub 9
Victory 6
Vida y Salud 13
El Viejo Horno 15
Parque Arenal
Museo Etnofolklorico
Mercado Los Pozos
Sitio Axs
Banco de Santa Cruz
Museo de Historia
PLAZA 24 DE SEPTIEMBRE
Casa de Cambio Aléman
Lavaderia La Paz
Manzano Uno
Cathedral
Mercado Nuevo
Museo de Arte Contemporaneo
Banco Mercantil
ENTEL
Trufis to Buena Vista & Yapacani
Old Bus Terminal
Museo de Historia Natural Noel Kempff Mercado
Micros to airport
Trufis to Samaipata
Expreso Misiones (buses to Chiquitos)
N
AVENIDA BUSCH
AVENIDA CANOTO
AV CENTENARIO
MÉXICO
IBAÑEZ
RAFAEL PEÑA
CUÉLLAR
SEOANE
BUENOS AIRES
FLORIDA
JUNÍN
AYACUCHO
INGAVI
S. DE FIGUEROA
PARI
MERCADO
MOS. SALVATIERRA
PARAPETI
LEMOINE
LA RIVA
AV IRALA
PICADA
CAÑADA
SENDA
SOLIS DE OLGUIN
H. SALAZAR
AV VELARDE
AV EJÉRCITO NACIONAL
AVENIDA GRIGOTA
AMBORÓ
TUNDY
VÁSQUEZ M.
VITUPUA
SAIPURU
I. LA CATÓLICA
(PRIMER ANILLO)
PERO VÉLEZ
YAPACANI
CALLAÚ
CORDILLERA
VALLEGRANDE
IZOZOG
COLÓN
VELASCO
INDEPENDENCIA
RENÉ MORENO
CHUQUISACA
24 DE SEPTIEMBRE
21 DE MAYO
LIBERTAD
SANTA BÁRBARA
ESPAÑA
SARAH
ICHILO
BENI
CABALLERO
CHARCAS
ARENALES
MURILLO
BOLIVAR
AROMA
QUIJARRO
CAMPERO
SUCRE
BALLIVIÁN
ÑUFLO DE CHÁVEZ
LA PAZ
COCHABAMBA
POTOSI
WARNES
REPUBLIQUETAS
M. I. SALVATIERRA
LEMOINE

things you're likely to need can be reached on foot or by a short taxi ride. There's a reasonable selection, though the mid-range places are mostly rather dull business hotels, while the budget places are more expensive than their equivalents elsewhere in Bolivia. A fan or (more expensive) air conditioning is pretty much essential in the heat and humidity – all but the cheapest rooms will have one or the other.

Budget

Alojamiento Santa Bárbara Santa Bárbara 181 ⓣ03/3321817 or 3321928. No-frills budget option with basic but clean rooms with cool tiled floors and shared bath (but no fans) around a small courtyard. ②

Hotel Amazonas Junín 214 ⓣ03/3334583. Clean, pleasant rooms with cable TV and friendly staff. Choose your room wisely as some resemble darkened cells, but more pleasant ones – more spacious, lighter and with less of a tropical-damp feel – are offered with some persistence. ③–④

Jodanga Backpackers' Hostel El Fuerte 1380 ⓣ03/3396542, ⓦwww.jodanga.com. Excellent backpacker haven run by an extremely helpful Bolivian-Australian couple. It's a 20min walk from the central plaza, but a swimming pool (complete with a well-stocked poolside bar), Jacuzzi, Play Station 2 and superb DVD collection make it by far the best budget choice in Santa Cruz. Dorm rooms all have a/c included. ②

Residencial 7 de Mayo Av Brasil ⓣ03/3489634. Directly opposite the Terminal Bi-Modal de Transporte, so convenient if you're arriving late, leaving early or just passing through. The clean and modern rooms come in a variety of prices depending on whether or not you want a private bath and a/c or fan. ②–③

Residencial Bolívar Sucre 131 ⓣ03/3342500. Longstanding backpackers' haunt with helpful staff and small but immaculately clean rooms (with fan and shared bath) around a cool, leafy patio with hammocks and several resident toucans. Often fills up, so worth phoning in advance to reserve a room if you're arriving late. Breakfast available. ②

Mid-range and luxury

Globetrotter Hotel Sara 49 ⓣ03/3372754. Pleasant and good-value little hotel with spacious but slightly musty rooms with a/c – all boasting cable TV, fridge and comfortable beds – set around a cool, peaceful, colonial-style courtyard. The helpful and well-travelled owner speaks English, French and German. Breakfast is included. ⑤

Gran Hotel Santa Cruz Moreno 269 ⓣ03/3348811, ⓦwww.granhotelsantacruz.com. One of the few top-range hotels in the city centre, built in grandiose style with lashings of marble and spacious and opulently furnished rooms and suites. Facilities include a swimming pool, sauna and gym, plus a good restaurant and bar. Breakfast included. ⑧–⑨

Hotel Bibosi, Junín 218 ⓣ03/3348548 or 3369173, ⓔhtlbibosi@hotmail.com. Reasonably priced mid-range hotel with clean, comfortable rooms with cable TV and fan or (more expensive) a/c; the pleasant rooftop restaurant has great views across the city. Breakfast included, and free coffee available. ⑤

Hotel Copacabana Junín 217 ⓣ03/3362770 or 3321843, ⓔhotelcocacabanascz@hotmail.com. Functional mid-range hotel catering mainly to commercial travellers, with clean, comfortable but drably decorated rooms with cable TV and fan or (more expensive) a/c, set on several floors around a narrow central courtyard with a slightly prison-hall feel, despite the many plants. There's also a restaurant, and breakfast is included. ⑤

Hotel Felimar Ayacucho 445 ⓣ03/3346677, ⓔhotelfelimar@hotmail.com. Efficient but rather bland business hotel offering well-furnished a/c rooms with cable TV, fridge and balconies overlooking the street, plus a restaurant and bar. ⑥

Hotel Lido 21 de Mayo 527 ⓣ03/3363555 or 3370596, ⓦwww.lido-hotel.com. Stylish, modern and efficiently run upper-mid-range hotel. The spacious rooms have plush furnishings, cable TV and a/c. There's also a restaurant, and breakfast is included. ⑤–⑥

Hotel Viru-Viru Junín 338 ⓣ03/3335298 or 3362922, ⓦwww.hotelviruviru.com. Centrally located mid-range option boasting comfortable modern a/c rooms with cable TV and balconies overlooking a large central courtyard swimming pool. ⑤

The City

Santa Cruz continues to grow at a phenomenal rate, spreading inexorably over the surrounding countryside in a mixture of ragged shantytowns, office developments and exclusive residential districts where oil executives, businessmen and made-good drug-traffickers relax in opulent mansions protected by armed security guards and high spiked walls. But though the ox-drawn carts that were a frequent sight on the city's muddy, unpaved streets until the 1960s have been entirely superseded by imported luxury 4WDs (known locally as "narcocruisers" because of the likely provenance of their owners' wealth), for all its new-found prosperity, Santa Cruz retains some of the feel of the isolated tropical outpost it was for so long. The old colonial **city centre** is still dominated by humble whitewashed houses with tiled roofs that extend over the pavements to provide shade and protection from wet weather, and when everything closes up in the middle of the day for an extended lunch break the city is suffused with a languid tropical indolence that belies its economic dynamism. Santa Cruz's bizarre cosmopolitanism also adds appeal: poor Andean migrants – their traditional costumes utterly out of place in the tropical heat and humidity – rub shoulders with Japanese rice farmers, Chinese businessmen, US oil workers, missionaries, DEA agents, and stern, red-faced Mennonites in denim dungarees.

Plaza 24 de Septiembre and around

At the centre of Santa Cruz is **Plaza 24 de Septiembre**, a spacious square with well-tended gardens shaded by tall trees where Cruceños gather to play chess, read a paper or just watch the world go by. The plaza is named after the day in 1810 when Santa Cruz declared independence and joined the struggle against Spanish rule. At its centre stands a statue of **Colonel Ignacio Warnes**, a pro-independence Argentine guerrilla leader who was military governor of Santa Cruz from 1813 to 1816, and carried out a great massacre of over a thousand indigenous Chiquitano prisoners captured fighting on the Spanish side before being executed himself along with 900 others when a Spanish army recaptured Santa Cruz – his head was displayed outside the city on a spike.

On the south side of the plaza stands the salmon-pink **Cathedral** (daily 7am–7pm), or Basílica Mayor de San Lorenzo, a hulking brick structure with twin bell towers. The Cathedral was built between 1845 and 1915 on the site of an original church dating back to 1605. The cool, vaulted interior boasts some fine silverwork around the altar, but the best religious art, sculpture and silverware is tucked away in the **Museo de Arte Sacro** (Tues & Thurs 10am–noon & 4–6pm, Sun 10am–noon and 6–8pm; $0.80), whose entrance is just to the right as you face the altar. Wood and canvas do not survive well in the warm, humid climate of Santa Cruz, and much of the cathedral's colonial religious art collection has been lost, but there are still some beautiful eighteenth-century mestizo-Baroque wood carvings of saints on display, including a magnificent **Santiago Matamoros** (St James the Moor-slayer), patron saint of Spain. Also known in South America as Santiago Mataindios, the Indian killer, Santiago is depicted here on horseback with sword raised aloft at the head of a Spanish army, trampling hordes of fleeing foreign foes. Another room is filled with exquisite silver plate, chalices, candlesticks and other religious ornaments, all decorated in a florid Baroque riot of intertwined leaves, flowers and fruit-laden vines populated by birds with extravagant plumage and angels that look more like satyrs. At the top of the wooden staircase, a room is filled with paintings of bishops and various keys and rings relating to the local diocese. The highlight here is (or so the museum claims) one of the world's smallest books – a 7mm book in which the Lord's Prayer is written in various languages.

Behind the cathedral on Calle Independencia, **Manzana 1**, Espacio de Arte (Ⓣ03/3395792, Ⓦwww.manzanauno.org; Tues–Sat 10am–12.30pm, 4–9pm; Sun 4–9pm, closed Mon; free) is a recent addition to Santa Cruz's burgeoning art scene, a cultural centre where month-long exhibitions of paintings, sculpture and photography are held, a mixture of exhibits from local, national and international artists. Four blocks east along Calle Sucre from the plaza a former public school has been converted into the pleasant courtyard setting of the **Museo de Arte Contemporaneo** (Tues–Fri 9am–noon, Sat and Sun 3–7pm; free). Art displays in various degrees of peculiarity/eccentricity can be found throughout the maze of small rooms, and there is usually someone at the door who is more than happy to help you try and make sense of them.

Museo Etnofolklórico

Four blocks north and a block east of Plaza 24 de Septiembre and inside the Parque Arenal (a little park with an artificial lake), the **Museo Etnofolklórico** (daily 8am–noon & 2.30–6pm; $0.80) houses a small but varied collection of artefacts that give a good introduction to the different indigenous ethnic groups of the Eastern Lowlands. Exhibits include photos and examples of the traditional dress worn by various groups, including the colourful costumes, wooden masks carved with animal faces, and bright feather headdresses worn by dancers during religious fiestas. Particularly striking are the brightly coloured robes and hoods of the "Gigantes" costumes from San Ignacio de Velasco – these are worn by dancers who use tall stilts and white facemasks to represent mythological giants. (Many of these ritual dances were used by the Jesuits either as a means of incorporating elements of traditional religion into Christian practice or to allegorically represent the triumph of Christianity over pre-Christian deities.) Also on display are some violins and other musical instruments handmade by the Chiquitanos and Guarayos of the former Jesuit missions, along with bows and arrows, plant-fibre hammocks and bags from the simpler material culture of the Ayoreos, a semi-nomadic hunter-gatherer people of the Chaco who were never successfully settled and converted by the Jesuits.

Museo de Historia Natural Noel Kempff Mercado

Eight blocks south of the plaza on Avenida Irala with Avenida Ejército Nacional, the **Museo de Historia Natural Noel Kempff Mercado** (daily 8am–12.30pm & 2.30–6pm; free) houses an extensive collection of dead insects, stuffed birds and pickled snakes, all displayed with good explanations in Spanish of their biology, habitat and lifecycle. Of particular interest is the display of various dangerous insects, such as the *vinchuca* or **assassin bug** (see p.54), with descriptions of the threat they pose. Look out particularly for the *vibora cuco*, a moth that bears a passing resemblance to a snake's head and which is widely considered extremely dangerous: it's traditionally believed (or at least put about) that someone bitten by one of these faces certain death unless he or (more usually) she has sexual intercourse within hours – in fact, its bite causes nothing more than slight irritation.

Biocentro Güembé

About a thirty-minute taxi ride northwest of central plaza brings you to the rather luxurious **Biocentro Güembé**, located at Kilómetro 7, Camino a Porongo/Zona Los Batos (Ⓦwww.biocentroguembe.com, Ⓔinfo@biocentroguembe.com; daily 8am–6pm; about $8 for a day at the park, with a basic package). It's best to look at the map on the website prior to visiting to better direct your taxi driver. This is a 46-acre holiday-camp-style resort and has an array of attractions including a huge **butterfly dome** reputed to be the world's biggest, an **orchid park** and a series of picturesque pools. There are also opportunities for trekking, horse riding and swimming, as well as some comfortable cabins (⑦ for a six-person cabin, plus $10 a day per adult) and camping (②) and an excellent restaurant if you decide to stay a while. Though it may be too artificial for many independent travellers, it is the latest place to be seen for wealthy Cruceños, who flock here at the weekends, and this in itself makes it an entertaining place to while away an afternoon.

Eating

Santa Cruz's relative wealth and cosmopolitanism are fairly well reflected in the city's wide variety of **restaurants**, catering to all budgets. A variety of international cuisine and vegetarian food is widely available, though local **camba food** predominates, mostly good beef simply cooked and accompanied by rice and yucca or plantain. With a few exceptions, the places listed here are all in the **city centre**, though in fact many of the more popular restaurants are outside the city centre on the **Segundo Anillo** (Avenida Cristóbal de Mendoza) between calles Alemania and Beni: massive, open-air places where Cruceños come to eat huge plates of barbecued meat at weekends.

Increasingly, European-style bars and restaurants are appearing along **Calle Monseñor Rivero**, about seven blocks directly north of the central plaza. Like the bar district of **Equipetrol**, this street has an array of coffee bars and smart eateries which are frequented by the cool-kid Cruceños and expats (and anyone else who can afford to splash out).

As elsewhere in Bolivia, the public markets are the best places to find cheap eats. The **Mercado Los Pozos**, in the northeast corner of the city centre, is arguably the best food market in Bolivia, with row upon row of stalls serving inexpensive and delicious local dishes like *locro de gallina* (chicken stew) and *sopa de mani* (peanut soup), while others sell an astonishing variety of tropical fruit juices and excellent *empanadas* and *salteñas*. There's also a whole subsection of Chinese foodstalls where you can get a tasty meal for less than $1. You might also like to spend a few hours at the **Mercado La Ramada**, Avenida Grigota with Calle Sutos, where pretty much everything you can think of is on sale across a sprawling mass of stalls. **Mercado Nuevo** is smaller but has the same hectic market bustle and is a conveniently short walk from the central plaza.

City centre

Cuerpomente Calle Aroma 64. Busy vegetarian restaurant offering a varied self-service buffet priced by weight (good value at around $2.30 a kilo) as well as soups, juices and *empanadas*. The food is tasty and wholesome, as long as the overzealous healthy-living mantras posted on the wall don't put you off.

Dumbo's Ayacucho 247. Painted in lurid shades of pink, yellow and green, and with indoor and outdoor seating around a fake waterfall, the Santa Cruz outlet of this nationwide chain is a veritable ice-cream palace, doling out a huge range of ice creams, snacks and juices as well as good breakfasts and some more substantial meals.

La Esquina del Pescado Florida with Sara. Excellent, inexpensive and always popular fish restaurant in a small wooden shack on a corner, serving big plates of delicious freshwater fish like *surubí*, *sabalo* and piranha fried, grilled or baked for around $2; the fish soup with yucca on the side ($1) is a meal in itself.

Hawaii Sucre with Beni. This bar-café is popular for its good strong coffee, juices, pastries, snacks and ice cream, and also serves more substantial meals. It's reasonably priced, despite the over-opulent decor, and is open from early in the morning till late at night.

Il Gatto Calle 24 de Septiembre with Arenales. Popular and moderately priced restaurant offering decent pizza, as well as live music or comedy on weekend evenings. Closed Mon.

Lorca Café René Moreno 20, first floor. With a balcony overlooking the plaza, the red interior of this funky bar-café is filled with arty photos and has live jazz, blues or folk music Thurs–Sun nights. The café serves a tasty array of gringo-pleasing delights, including a pasta of the day ($3–4), as well as a scattering of traditional Bolivian dishes.

Michelangelo Chuquisaca 502. Ⓣ03/3348403, Ⓔmichelangelo@cotas.com.bo. One of the finest restaurants in Bolivia (it gets busy and it is worth reserving a table, especially at the weekends), offering superb, authentic Italian cuisine and immaculate service in an intimate atmosphere. It's not cheap, with main courses from around $5, but is an excellent place to splash out, especially if you've just hit town after a spell in the wilderness. Closed Sun.

Patujú Bení 50 (not far down from Hawaii, on other side of road). Wholesome, tasty Bolivian dishes such as good *salteñas* and *picante de pollo* (a spicy chicken dish served with rice or yucca) in a traditional wooden-panelled restaurant with a small shaded garden at the back.

Victory Junín with 21 de Mayo. On the first floor of the Galeria Casco Viejo shopping arcade, with outdoor seating, this popular bar-restaurant is a good place to relax and watch the world rush by in the busy streets below. There's a wide range of reasonably priced sandwiches, pizzas and pastas, and more substantial meat and fish main courses, as well as good breakfasts, excellent coffee and juices, cold beer and cocktails until past midnight. Closed Sun.

Vida y Salud Ayacucho with Vallegrande. Popular little vegetarian restaurant whose tasty and filling set *almuerzo* is such good value at less than $2 that you need to get here before 1pm to be sure of getting served. The à la carte menu in the evening is also good, but a little more expensive. Mon–Fri only.

El Viejo Horno Velasco with Pari. No-nonsense *colla* restaurant serving up filling set *almuerzos* for less than $1 as well as La Paz favourites like *fricase* (pork stew) and *riñon al jugo* (kidneys in sauce) to impecunious Altiplano migrants.

Segundo Anillo

Casa del Camba Av Cristóbal de Mendoza 569. The best of the many large, traditional Cruceño restaurants on this stretch of the Segundo Anillo, and a great place to enjoy reasonably priced *parillada* (barbecued meat) and *pacumutu* (a kind of massive shish kebab), served by straw-sombreroed waiters to the accompaniment of live traditional *camba* music.

Escuela Gastronomica Tatapy Av Santa Cruz 832. Restaurant school run by a Spanish NGO where you can get excellent international cuisine prepared by local trainee chefs: a full meal will set you back about $10 a head. It's out on the Segundo Anillo, so you'll need to take a taxi from the city centre. Mon–Fri evenings only.

Makhassan Las Americas 71 Ⓦwww.makhassan.com. This top-class establishment, run by a team with experience in some of the world's greatest restaurants and hotels, is fast earning a reputation for producing some of the best Asian cuisine in South America. Expect to pay about $7–10 a person, but it's worth splashing out.

Calle Monseñor Rivero

Taberna Terramar Monseñor Rivero 281. Charming Spanish restaurant with tasteful decor and comfy seats offering traditional peninsular dishes, like gazpacho and tortilla española ($3–4).

Drinking and nightlife

Whether it's because of the humid climate (as visiting *collas* assert), the beauty and hot-bloodedness of the Cruceñas (as popular mythology insists), or the combination of large disposable incomes and abundant cocaine (as one can only suspect), many Cruceños love nothing better than to stay up late, eating, drinking and dancing the night away. After dark the city moves to a tropical rhythm, and Santa Cruz's nightlife scene is definitely the liveliest in Bolivia. This comes to the fore during Carnaval (late Feb or early March), when as well as the usual frenzy of water-fighting, dancing and carnival queens, the city stages a series of massive and wild masked balls.

The nightlife centre for Santa Cruz's wealthier residents is out in the exclusive (though rather brashly so) **Equipetrol** neighbourhood, about 5km northwest of the city centre, where a stretch of Avenida San Martín between the second and third *anillos* is lined with a series of flashy bars, restaurants and nightclubs. Unless you have your own car (in which case you'll be able to imitate rich Cruceños by cruising between different bars with the stereo on full blast hooting at passers-by), you'll need to take a taxi out here and back from the city centre. You'll also need to bring plenty of cash and dress to impress – drinks are expensive (cocktails $3–4, beer $2–3), cover charges standard, and doormen aren't afraid of turning away scruffy gringo backpackers.

Within the **city centre** nightlife is more low-key and dispersed, but there's still a good range of lively bars and restaurants where you can drink till late and enjoy live music and dancing on the weekends. For up-to-date listings of what's on, look out for *Kaos* – a small booklet detailing the latest concerts, films and plays – found in cafés and hotels in the city centre and some more expensive out-of-town hotels.

City centre

La Casona Arenales 222. Upmarket bohemian bar-restaurant with rustic decor, mellow music and a relaxed ambience. There's live jazz and blues music on Thurs–Sat nights (small cover charge), as well as refined European meals like goulash and sausages ($5–7). It also has a swanky delicatessen where you can pick up rare treats like fig pâté and German mustard. Closed Sun.

Clapton Blues Bar Murillo with Arenales. As the name suggests, this is a dimly lit, smoke-filled blues bar that really only gets going after about 11pm on Thurs–Sat nights, when live local blues and rock bands perform. Closed Sun & Mon.

El Egua 24 de Septiembre with Rafael Peña. A very lively salsa club that exudes so much energy that the dancing often spills out onto the street at the weekends. The current haunt of a more laid-back crowd than is found in Equipetrol, it comes alive after 11pm.

Oz Pub Warnes 280 with Cochabamba. Popular, relaxed hang-out with tourists and Cruceños alike, with live music from about 11pm at weekends. Often closed during the week.

Shamrock Irish Pub Plaza 24 de Septiembre. On the first floor of the Bolívar shopping centre, with tables overlooking the plaza, this upmarket Irish-themed bar is a great place to enjoy a beer, cocktail or coffee while watching the world go by outside, and gets very lively in the evenings, especially at weekends. Food is also available, including relatively exotic delights like Irish stew, full Irish breakfasts and an excellent vegetarian lasagne.

Equipetrol

Discoteca M@d Av San Martín. Currently Santa Cruz's wildest and most extravagant nightclub, a state-of-the-art, purpose-built disco with futuristic decor, a high-tech light-show and a pumping sound system that draws crowds of rich and beautiful Cruceños.

Varadero Av San Martín. A club of similar style and extravagance with a buzzing dance floor where people love to be seen and are dressed to impress.

Listings

Airlines Aerosur, Colón with Av Irala ⓣ03/3364446; American Airlines, Beni 167 ⓣ03/3341314; TAM, Aeropuerto El Trompillo, ⓣ03/3532639; TAM Mercosur, 21 de Mayo with Florida ⓣ03/3371999.

Banks and exchange You can change US dollars and traveller's cheques at the Casa de Cambio Aleman, on the east side of Plaza 24 de Septiembre, and there are plenty of banks with ATMs where you can make cash withdrawals on Visa or Mastercard: try the Banco Mercantil, Av Moreno with Figueroa, or the Banco de Santa Cruz, just west of Plaza 24 de Septiembre on Junín.

Bookshop Los Amigos del Libro, Ingavi with Moreno, sometimes stocks a limited selection of English-language books. Also try Librería Ateneo Independencia 365.

Car rental Barron's, Av Cristobal Mendoza 286 ⓣ03/3338823; Localiza, Carretera al Norte 3km ⓣ03/3414343, ⓦwww.localizabolivia.com, ⓔreservas@localizabolivia.com.

Hospital The Clinica Lourdes, Moreno with Pari (ⓣ03/3325518), is a good place to go if you need a doctor. For emergencies, head to the Hospital San Juan de Dios Cuéllar with España (ⓣ03/3332222), or the Hospital Japonés, 3rd Anillo, close to junction with Conavi (ⓣ03/3462031).

Internet access There are numerous Internet cafés around the city centre: Sitio Axs (ⓣ03/3730217) at Avenida Cañota with Buenos Aires has fast machines and air-conditioning, opens early till late and charges under $1 an hour. There are a number of Internet options on the first floor of the Shopping Bolívar – the red-and-cream building on your right if you leave the plaza along Calle Bolívar.

Laundry Lavandería La Paz, La Paz 42 with Chuquisaca, offers an efficient same-day service for about $2 a kilo.

Outdoor equipment Caza y Pesca El Aventurero, at Arenales 150, has a comprehensive range of quality imported equipment.

Pharmacy Farmacia Gutierrez, just off Plaza 24 de Septiembre at 21 de Mayo 76 (with Junín). Open 9am–9pm.

Post office Correo Central, just northwest of Plaza 24 de Septiembre on Junín.

Taxis El Cristo ⓣ03/3622828 or 3538585; Exclusivo ⓣ03/3572323 or 3577471; Flecha Camba ⓣ03/3520770 or 3526282.

Telephone office The main ENTEL office is on Warnes with Av Moreno, and there are plenty of ENTEL phone booths on the city's main streets. Not far out of the city centre, you're likely to spot some older booths, which have brightly coloured moulded

Santa Cruz tour operators

Many tour agencies in Santa Cruz are in the business of selling holidays in Florida to wealthy Cruceños, but an increasing number of operators are recognizing the potential of the Eastern Lowlands, including overnight trips to the Parque Nacional Amboró and the Jesuit Mission towns of Chiquitos, and longer trips to the Parque Nacional Noel Kempff Mercado or the Pantanal. The following companies are all well established and have good reputations:

Amboro Tours Calle Pari 161 ⓣ03/3390600, ⓦwww.amborotours.com. Well-established Bolivian setup with friendly staff. Perhaps occasionally lacking understanding of what might interest foreign tourists.

Camba Tours Sucre 8 ⓣ03/3349999, ⓔcambatour@cotas.com.bo. Offers tours to all the highlights of the Santa Cruz region. Reasonably priced.

Forest Tours Calle Cuéllar 22 ⓣ03/3372042, ⓦwww.forestbolivia.com. A value-for-money agency which specializes in trips to Amboró. Caters for most needs and is Spanish/English-speaking. Also offers hour-long flights with spectacular views of the Santa Cruz area from $85 per person.

Fremen Av Cañoto with 21 de Mayo ⓣ03/3338535, ⓦwww.andes-amazonia.com. An agency very popular with Cruceños, specializing in river tours from Trinidad.

Ruta Verde Calle 21 de Mayo 332 ⓣ03/3396470, ⓦwww.rutaverdebolivia.com. Highly professional agency with outstanding attention to detail. Run by a very helpful couple, Gijs and Maria, who both have excellent local knowledge and speak Spanish, Dutch and English. A superb choice for trips to the Pantanal and Noel Kempff. Also ask them about their plans for a Bolivian home-stay Spanish language school.

plastic covers shaped like macaws, toucans and other birds and animals. For local calls and calls within Santa Cruz department, you're better off using the cheaper COTAS co-operative telephone boxes; COTAS phonecards are sold by street vendors throughout the city.

Moving on from Santa Cruz

Santa Cruz is the transportation hub for the whole of eastern Bolivia, and exploring the region inevitably involves several trips in and out of the city by bus, trufi (long-distance collective taxi), train or plane. The city is also well connected to the rest of Bolivia by road and air, and to neighbouring Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay by railway, road and air.

By bus

Most long-distance buses depart from the modern **Terminal Bi-Modal de Transportes**, the combined bus terminal and train station (information on ⓣ03/3463388 or 3463900), about 2km west of the city centre just outside the Segundo Anillo at the end of Avenida Brasil. Most **long-distance buses** – including those to Camiri, Sucre, Trinidad, Villamontes and Yacuiba – depart in the evening and travel overnight. Those to **La Paz** leave either early in the morning or in the evening, while to **Cochabamba** there are departures throughout the day – if in doubt, phone the information office to check departure times and frequency. For the major routes – Cochabamba, La Paz, Trinidad – there's generally no need to buy a ticket in advance, but for other destinations it's a good idea to buy a ticket a day in advance (or on the morning before for overnight departures). From the terminal there are also daily buses to **Asunción** in Paraguay, a tough journey across the vast wilderness expanse of the Gran Chaco which takes 24 hours when conditions are good, and perhaps twice that in the November–April rainy season.

Buses to the Jesuit mission towns of **Chiquitos** leave from outside the offices of three different bus companies, located in various parts of the city, though it's possible they'll be moved to the Terminal Bi-Modal during the lifetime of this book. The three companies are: Linea 131 del Este, Suárez Arana with Barrón; Expreso Misiones, Av Omar Chavez with Solis de Olguín; and Expreso Jenecheru, Choferes del Chaco with the Segundo Anillo – all have buses leaving every evening to San Ignacio. Linea 131 del Este also has four departures daily to San Javier and three departures daily to Concepción.

To reach **Buena Vista**, the main entrance point for the Parque Nacional Amboró, catch a trufi headed to the town of **Yapacani** from Calle Izozog with La Riva, just north of the old bus terminal; these leave throughout the day as soon as they have enough passengers. To **Samaipata**, several micros leave daily each afternoon from the Terminal Bi-Modal, but unless you're on a very tight budget you're better off getting a trufi from the Expreso Samaipata office two blocks south of the old bus terminal on Avenida Omar Chavez with Solis de Olguín. These are faster, more comfortable and more convenient than the buses, and only slightly more expensive. They leave as soon as they have five passengers, but most people travel in the morning, so the earlier you turn up, the less time you're likely to have to wait.

By train

Santa Cruz is the hub of the **Ferrocarril Oriental**, Bolivia's eastern railway, which runs east to the Brazilian border at Quijjaro, via San José de Chiquitos, and south to the Argentine border at Yacuiba in the Chaco, via Villamontes. Trains run from the Terminal Bi-Modal **to Quijarro** (18–24hr) on Monday and Saturday at 3.30pm, and on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday at 7pm, while those **to Yacuiba** (12–16hr) leave on Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 5pm. Trains have three different classes: first and second class are both fairly basic and almost always crowded, with first class costing a little more and having slightly better seats; **Pullman** costs twice as much but is still reasonably good value, and has comfortable reclining seats that are well worth the extra expense. Both lines are also served by a **Ferrobus**, a much faster and more expensive two-carriage train that stops at few intermediate stations and is equipped with semi- or fully-reclining sleeping seats, air-conditioning, piped music, video screen and revolting airline-style food. The Ferrobus to Quijarro (10hr) leaves on Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday at 7pm; the Ferrobus to Yacuiba (10–12hr) on Tuesday and Saturday at 8pm. Tickets for all trains usually go on sale at the **ticket office** (Mon–Fri 8am–12.30pm & 2.30–6pm, Sat 8am–12.30pm & 1.30–3.30pm) the day before, or on the morning of the same day for evening departures. To get seats in the cheaper carriages, you may need to turn up before the ticket office opens and queue to be sure of getting a ticket, especially on the Santa Cruz to Quijarro line, and especially during public holiday periods. Getting a seat at intermediate stations along the Santa Cruz–Quijarro line can be a real problem, though fortunately the practice of ticket touting has largely been eliminated by the requirement that passengers present their identity card or **passport** when buying tickets and boarding trains – the passenger's name and document number is then written on the ticket to stop anyone else trying to use it. Remember to buy a yellow "platform tax" ticket (3Bs) from the small kiosk before boarding the platform.

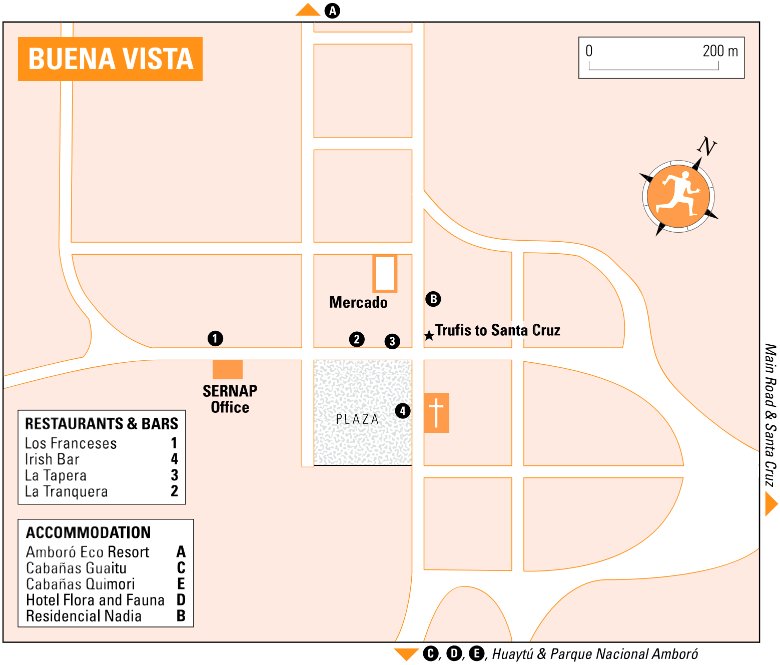
Other than the Ferrobuses, trains on both these long routes are slow and unreliable. Snacks, drinks and full meals are sold through the windows at intermediate stations, and vendors often board the train with *empanadas*, coffee and the like, but it's worth bringing something to eat with you, as well as plenty of water, insect repellent and a blanket or sleeping bag. Trains travel largely by night, and the lowlands scenery is fairly monotonous anyway – the Santa Cruz to Quijarro route is known as the “Train of Death”, not because it’s dangerous but because it’s such a boring ride.

By plane

Moving on from Santa Cruz by **plane** is a good way of saving time and avoiding arduous overland journeys, especially in the November–April rainy season when road conditions deteriorate. From **Viru-Viru airport** (for flight information call ☎03/3852400 or ☎181), there are several flights daily to Cochabamba, La Paz, Sucre and Trinidad, as well as less frequent flights to Cobija, Puerto Suarez and Tarija. In addition, American Airlines, LAB (if it is in operation), TAM, Mercosur and Varig all have several **international flights** weekly to destinations including Asunción, Buenos Aires, Salta, Tucuman, Manaus, Río de Janeiro, São Paulo, Montevideo, Panamá City and Miami. The military airline TAM also flies once a week to San Ignacio de Velasco (see p.331) from the smaller **El Trompillo airport**, just south of the city centre.

Buena Vista

Some 100km northwest of Santa Cruz along the main road to Cochabamba lies the picturesque and peaceful little town of **BUENA VISTA**, the northern gateway to **Parque Nacional Amboró**. Raised slightly above the plains, and with a somewhat fresher climate, the town is aptly named, enjoying good views to the densely forested mountain slopes of Amboró. Buena Vista is now an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Irish Bar 4
La Tapera 3
La Tranquera 2
ACCOMMODATION
Amboró Eco Resort A
Cabañas Guaitu C
Cabañas Quimori E
Hotel Flora and Fauna D
Residencial Nadia B
C, D, E, Huaytú & Parque Nacional Amboró

emerging ecotourism centre and a popular retreat for weekenders from Santa Cruz, though during the week it remains a sleepy place with a population of just a few thousand.

The town was originally founded in 1694 as a **Jesuit mission** from which it was hoped to convert the Chiriguanos, the region's Guaraní-speaking indigenous inhabitants who proved the staunchest opponents to Spanish (and later Bolivian) rule in the Eastern Lowlands. Sadly, the eighteenth-century Jesuit church, the Iglesia de los Santos Desposorios – similar in style to those of Chiquitos, but with a central stone bell tower – was demolished in the 1960s and replaced by the unattractive modern brick structure that stands today.

Arrival and information

Micros and **trufis** from Santa Cruz drop passengers off in the main plaza before continuing to Yapacani. To return to Santa Cruz, either wait around on the plaza for one of the infrequent micros, or go to the 10 de Febrero trufi company office just off the plaza next to the *Residencial Nadia*. They'll phone Yapacani and reserve you a space in the next trufi for Santa Cruz. It is no longer permitted to enter Parque Nacional Amboró without being part of a tour, and by far the easiest way to enter is by signing up with a tour agency within Buena Vista itself or from Santa Cruz or Samaipata. Tours will have to register at the SERNAP office, two blocks southwest of the plaza. There is also an interpretation centre where you can learn a little more about the park itself. There are no banks in Buena Vista so remember to bring cash from elsewhere.

Accommodation

Although Buena Vista is beginning to take off as a weekend destination for Cruceños, **accommodation** is still fairly limited, though budget options are on the increase. There are also a number of luxury country club-style places with air-conditioning and swimming pools several kilometres from town on the main Cochabamba–Santa Cruz road, but these are expensive and inconvenient if you want to visit Amboró. Some hotels may allow you to camp on their grounds.

Amboró Eco Resort 7km away along the Carretera Nacional to Santa Cruz ☎03/3422372. Set in beautiful forest surroundings with a network of private trails, this is the hang-out for the social crème de la crème of Bolivia. Comfortable, spacious rooms with a/c and a swimming pool with accompanying bar. ⑦–⑧

Cabañas Guaitu About 300m outside town on the road south towards Huaytú ☎01942529 (mobile). Large, self-contained cabins (⑤) that sleep up to six people, with cooking facilities and private bath. There's also a shady camping area ($3, plus $1 per person).

Cabañas Quimorí About 400m outside town on the road south towards Huaytú ☎03/9322081. Clean, well-appointed *cabañas* with private bath set amid a spacious and secluded forest garden, with good views of Amboró. ④

Hotel Flora y Fauna 4km from town on the road south towards Huaytú, then another 1km up the marked drive off to the left – a $1.50 or so motorbike taxi ride from town ☎01943706 (mobile). Owned by the renowned British ornithologist Robin Clark, this delightful place is strictly for serious nature lovers, with simple but comfortable *cabañas* with fan and private bath, set amidst well-preserved, wildlife-rich rainforest – there's a bird observation tower and expert guides can be arranged. Minimum stay of two nights, and all-inclusive packages with English-style food are available for $50 per person per night. ⑦

Hotel Sumuqué 250m northwest of the plaza ☎03/9322080. Reasonably comfortable family-style *cabañas* with fan and private bath that sleep up to five people, set in a large, peaceful garden. ③

Residencial Nadia Just off the north corner of the plaza ☎03/9322049. The only real budget option in town, and the lack of competition shows, with basic and overpriced rooms. ②

Eating and drinking

As usual, the cheapest place **to eat** is the **market**, a block northeast of the plaza, where stalls serve up coffee, juices, *empanadas* and more substantial meals like soup from early in the morning; this is also the place to buy food and other supplies if you're heading into the Parque Nacional Amboró. By far the best **restaurant** in town is the French-run *Los Franceses*, a block southwest of the plaza opposite the park office, which has substantial and delicious main courses like pork in white wine sauce or exquisite *surubí a la provençale* ($4–5), as well as excellent home-made pâtés and home-cured ham. Alternatively, the *La Tranquera* and *La Tapera* restaurants side by side on the northwest side of the plaza serve up good, reasonably priced Bolivian standards like beef *churrascos* and fried chicken, as well as coffee, cold drinks, juices, pizzas, sandwiches and other snacks. In a kiosk in the middle of the plaza with outdoor seating, the friendly *Café Buena Vista* serves excellent locally grown coffee, as well as cold drinks, juices, cakes and other snacks. The *Irish Pub* is also a friendly, casual place with a real *cabaña* feel and seating on the plaza.

Parque Nacional Amboró

Forty kilometres west of Santa Cruz, **Parque Nacional Amboró** spans some 4300 square kilometres of a great forest-covered spur of the Andes that juts out into the eastern plains. Situated at the confluence of three major bio-geographic regions – the Andes, the Amazon rainforest and the Northern Chaco – and ranging in altitude from 3300m to just 300m above sea level, Amboró's steep, densely forested slopes support an astonishing biodiversity. Over 830 different types of **bird** have been recorded here – the highest confirmed bird count for any protected area in the world. Sightings have included a large number of endemic species and such rarities as the cock-of-the-rock, red-fronted and military macaws, and the blue-horned curassow or unicorn bird, which was thought to have been extinct until it was rediscovered here. The park is also home to a wide range of rainforest **mammals**, including jaguars, giant anteaters, tapirs and several species of monkey, while its enormous array of plant and insect species is still largely unexplored.

This biological wealth is all the more amazing given that Amboró is so close to Santa Cruz, and accessible from both the old and new roads between that city and Cochabamba, which run along the southern and northern boundaries of the park. However, though it makes life easier for scientists and ecotourists eager to explore the park, this ready accessibility and proximity to a major city has made Amboró particularly vulnerable, placing it on the front line in the battle between conservationists and impoverished peasant farmers.

The national park was first established in 1984, and was expanded in 1990 to encompass some 6300 square kilometres. However, by this time the fringes of the park were already under huge pressure from thousands of poor peasant farmers, most of them migrants from Potosí and Cochabamba departments, who began clearing the forest for agriculture, as well as hunting and logging inside the park boundaries. Amid rising tension between peasant colonists and conservation groups, in 1995 the Bolivian government gave in to political pressure from the colonists and reduced the park by 2000 square kilometres, creating a "Multiple-Use Zone" around the borders of the park. In theory, this is a sort of buffer zone where the land claims of already established peasant farmers are recognized but where sustainable development practices are supposed to be implemented. In practice, with no previous experience of tropical agriculture and little technical support, the Andean migrants have already largely deforested this buffer zone and exhausted its fragile soils, and are beginning to encroach on the remaining park area, despite the efforts of a dedicated but under-resourced team of park guards.

For the visitor, this means that the parts of the park that are easiest to reach are also those most likely to have been affected by colonist incursions, while the pristine interior regions of the park are deliberately kept relatively inaccessible. Nonetheless, the park refuges reached from Amboró are set amid splendid and largely intact rainforest, and the chances of seeing some wildlife on even a short visit are fairly high. The higher-altitude southern section of the park, which includes some beautiful cloudforest, can only be visited from Samaipata (see opposite).

The Buena Vista section

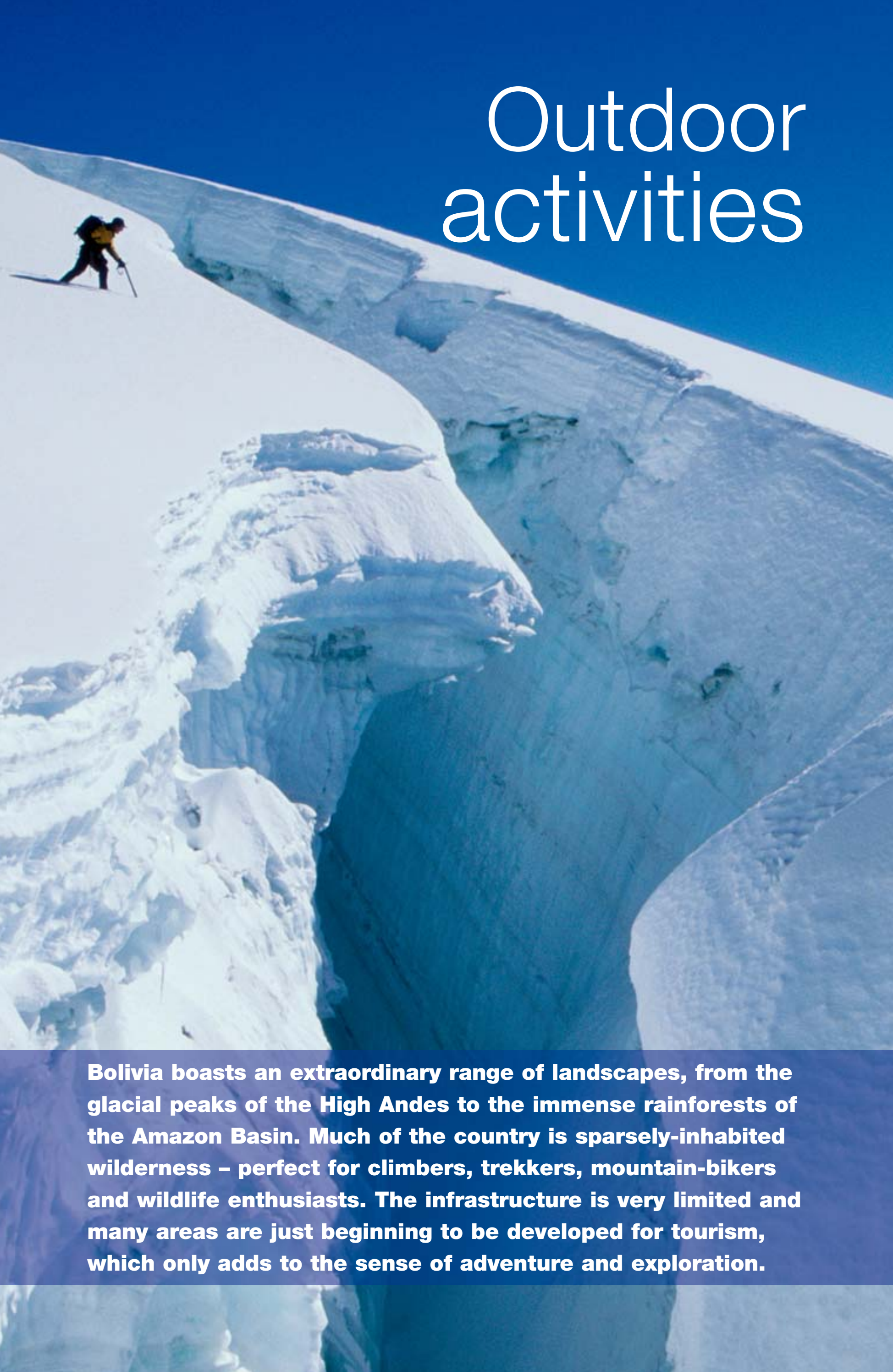
From Buena Vista, a rough road runs southeast along the borders of the Multiple-Use Zone (marked by the rushing waters of the Río Surutú), passing through a series of colonist settlements from where side trails cross the river and head into the park. The landscape around the settlements is heavily deforested, with large clearings where meagre crops of maize and rice grow in overgrown fields dotted with the blackened stumps of felled trees, but on the west side of the river the steep, densely forested mountains of Amboró loom inviolate.

Some 20km from Buena Vista, the road reaches **Huaytú**, from where a rough track crosses the river and leads 14km to **La Chonta**, a park guards' station just across the "red line" between the Multiple-Use Zone and the national park itself. There are plenty of trails through the surrounding forest from here, and good swimming in the nearby Río Saguayo. About four hours' walk from here in the interior of the park is a site where the extremely rare blue-horned currasow can be seen, while a tough day's walk downstream along the Río Saguayo brings you to another park guards' station, Saguayo, from where it's another day or so back to Buena Vista.

Continuing along the main track beyond Huaytú for a further 15km brings you to the settlement of **Santa Rosa**. From here, a rough ten-kilometre track crosses the river and heads to the park guards' refuge at **Macuñuco**, inside the Multiple-Use Zone. There are plenty of trails into the forest here, one of which leads to a delightful waterfall. A few kilometres before you reach Macuñuco on this track, you pass the village of **Villa Amboró**, where there's another basic **refuge** with cooking facilities and a series of forest trails – locals act as guides and rent out horses. You can book a stay here through the NGO PROBIOMA (see box, p.320). Accommodation with all meals and guided walks through the jungle costs around $35 per person per day, but if you just turn up and have your own food you can negotiate a price for accommodation alone. Alternatively, you could just come for the day, and hire a guide to lead you along the forest trails.

The Samaipata section

The southern border of **the park** lies just a dozen kilometres from Samaipata (see opposite) on the other side of the mountain ridge that rises to the north, and is easy to visit with one of the town's tour agencies (see box, p.316). This section of Amboró is much higher in altitude than the areas close to Buena Vista, and is therefore ecologically very different, comprising beautiful



Outdoor activities

Bolivia boasts an extraordinary range of landscapes, from the glacial peaks of the High Andes to the immense rainforests of the Amazon Basin. Much of the country is sparsely-inhabited wilderness – perfect for climbers, trekkers, mountain-bikers and wildlife enthusiasts. The infrastructure is very limited and many areas are just beginning to be developed for tourism, which only adds to the sense of adventure and exploration.

▲ Trekking through the Andes

Trekking

With roads few and far between, trekking on foot or horseback is the best way to explore the spectacular mountain scenery of the Bolivian Andes. The highlands are covered by a network of footpaths connecting remote indigenous villages, climbing over high passes ringed by snow-capped summits and plunging down into the densely forested valleys of the Upper Amazon. Local tour companies in La Paz and some other cities and towns make it easy to organize treks of several days or even weeks, camping out under the stars in the heart of the wilderness. But if you have your own equipment and speak a little Spanish it's easy to hire local guides and horses or pack mules and set off independently. Some of the best trekking routes are ancient paved-stone highways built by the Incas and earlier Andean societies. Three of Bolivia's most popular routes – the **Choro**, **Takesi** and **Yunga Cruz** trails – follow the old **Inca trails** across the Cordillera Real south of La Paz. The shores of **Lago Titicaca** and **Isla del Sol** are excellent for shorter hikes, combining gentle gradients with incredible scenery and intriguing ancient ruins.

Mountain biking

The popularity of mountain biking among travellers to Bolivia has exploded in recent years, above all because of the attraction of riding what's known as **The World's Most Dangerous Road**. This hair-raising route provides one of the longest and steepest continuous descents anywhere in the world, with a vertical drop of 3500m over just 64km, plunging from frozen peaks into the humid tropical valleys of the Yungas through some of the most spectacular scenery anywhere in Bolivia. Guided trips can be arranged with specialist agencies in La Paz, who provide the bikes and drive you up to the start of the ride so you hardly have to pedal at all.

▶ Crossing a crevasse on Huayna Potosi

Climbing

With hundreds of summits over 5000m and dozens over 6000m, the possibilities for mountain climbers in Bolivia are inexhaustible. As with trekking, the most popular region is the **Cordillera Real**, which is within easy reach of La Paz and has plenty of dramatic high peaks, several of which are well within reach of climbers with only limited experience. Among them is **Huayna Potosi**, which at 6090m is one of the few 6000m-plus summits in South America that can be conquered by people with no mountaineering experience at all. The volcanic peaks of the Cordillera Occidental also offer some excellent climbs, as do the more remote and rarely explored Cordillera Apolobamba and Cordillera Quimsa Cruz. There are several reliable climbing agencies in La Paz that can organize expeditions with qualified guides, and provide decent equipment if you don't have your own.

Four-wheel-drive expeditions

If all this physical activity sounds too exhausting, never fear: some of Bolivia's most spectacular wilderness regions can be explored sitting down, on the admittedly bumpy seat of a Landcruiser. From the remote town of Uyuni you can take three- or four-day tours across the stunning white expanse of the **Salar de Uyuni** – the world's largest salt flat – and on into the otherworldly landscape of the far southern Altiplano, a harsh but beautiful region of frozen deserts, volcanic peaks and bizarrely coloured mineral lakes that is also home to flocks of flamingos and herds of vicuña – a rarely seen wild relative of the llama.

▲ Deep in the Amazon rainforest

Rainforest adventures

Heading upriver in a motorized dug-out canoe through the pristine rainforests of the Amazon is an unforgettable experience, and the best way to see the infinitely varied plant and animal life of the most bio-diverse region on earth. Great swathes of the Bolivian Amazon are now protected nature reserves, making it possible to camp out in the forest or stay at one of a growing number of eco-lodges operated by indigenous groups. The best place to start is undoubtedly the town of **Rurrenabaque** for expeditions into the forests of **Parque Nacional Madidi** or through swamps and grasslands along the **Río Yacuma**, which abounds with an astonishing number of caimans, giant anacondas and pink freshwater dolphins.

cloudforest with gnarled trees covered in lichen and epiphytes. Most one-day trips to Amboró head along a rough track to the hamlet of **La Yunga**, from where a short walk takes you into the cloudforest. Although you'll see large numbers of rare and strangely prehistoric-looking tree ferns up to 10m high, this region lies in the Multiple-Use Zone close to areas of human settlement, so the chances of seeing much in the way of birds or other wildlife are slim. To get into pristine cloudforest you'll need to trek further into the park and camp overnight – a good place to head for is **Río Barrientos**, reached via the Abra de los Toros.

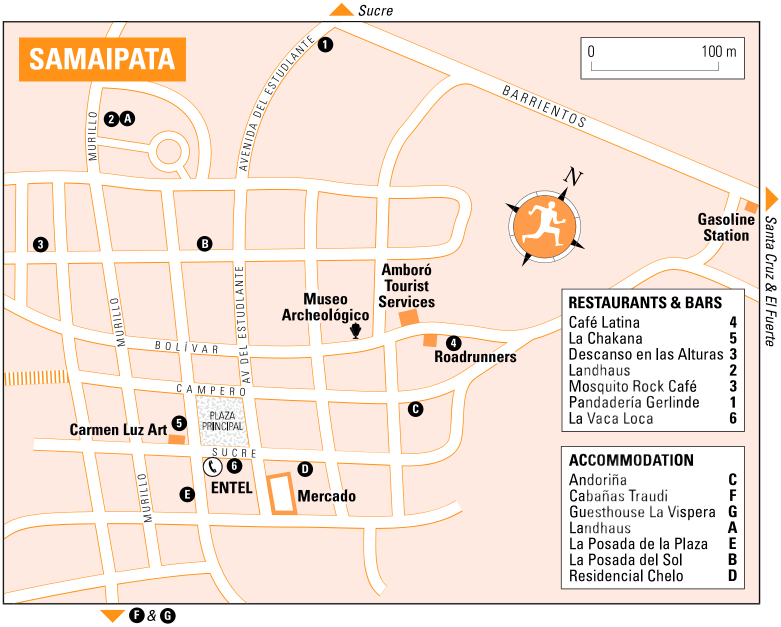
Practicalities

There are two ways to visit the park from Buena Vista. The easiest is to go on an organized trip with one of the **tour operators** in Buena Vista. For about $30 per person they offer two-day trips into the park, camping overnight or staying in one of the refuges, usually at either La Chonta or Macuñuco, with all meals, a guide, camping equipment and transport included. They can also arrange longer trips and treks deeper into the park. Amboró Tours (Ⓣ03/9322093, Ⓔamborotours@yahoo.com), opposite the church just off the plaza in Buena Vista, are the most professional outfit. You are no longer allowed to visit the park **without being accompanied by a guide or official tour operator**.

A **micro** from the plaza in Buena Vista runs daily along the boundary of the park via Huaytú and Santa Rosa, returning the next day – times vary, so ask around in Buena Vista to see when the micro passes through, and check the return time with the driver so you don't get stuck on the way out. From the road you'll still have to cross the Río Saguayo (which can be impassable in the Nov–April rainy season) and walk over 10km to reach either La Chonta or Macuñuco. A good alternative therefore is to **rent a jeep** to take you into the park (with a hired guide) and return later to collect you – you can arrange this through one of the tour operators.

Samaipata

Some 120km west of Santa Cruz on the old mountain road to Cochabamba, the peaceful little town of **SAMAIPATA** is enjoying growing popularity as a tourist destination amongst Bolivians and foreign travellers alike. Nestled in an idyllic valley surrounded by rugged, forest-covered mountains, the town enjoys a cool, fresh climate compared to the sweltering eastern plains, and has emerged as a popular weekend resort for people from Santa Cruz – appropriately enough, since its Quechua name means "rest in the highlands". Innumerable good walking trails run through the surrounding countryside, the beautiful cloudforests of the Parque Nacional Amboró are within easy reach, and just 9km outside town stands one of Bolivia's most intriguing archeological sites: the mysterious, ruined pre-Hispanic ceremonial complex known as **El Fuerte**. All this makes Samaipata the kind of place many travellers arrive in planning to stay a couple of days and end up staying a week or longer – indeed, a growing number of European residents have settled here permanently, setting up hotels, restaurants and tour agencies. They've also helped establish Samaipata as the flagship of modern organic agricultural techniques in Bolivia, and the surrounding farms produce many of the non-tropical vegetables consumed in Santa Cruz.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PLAZA PRINCIPAL
SUCRE
Carmen Luz Art
ENTEL
Mercado
F & G
RESTAURANTS & BARS
Café Latina 4
La Chakana 5
Descanso en las Alturas 3
Landhaus 2
Mosquito Rock Café 3
Pandadería Gerlinde 1
La Vaca Loca 6
ACCOMMODATION
Andoriña C
Cabañas Traudi F
Guesthouse La Vispera G
Landhaus A
La Posada de la Plaza E
La Posada del Sol B
Residencial Chelo D

Arrival, information and accommodation

Micros from Santa Cruz arrive in the Plaza Principal, the central square. **Trufis** from Santa Cruz also stop here, but should drop you off wherever you want – convenient if you want to stay in one of the out-of-town places. For **information** on Samaipata and the surrounding area, the best place to go is the helpful and enthusiastic English-, German- and Spanish-speaking tour operator, Roadrunners (☎03/9446193) on Calle Bolívar. Often hostels and guesthouse owners will be more than happy to help you find out what is on offer. If you're staying at the *Guesthouse La Vispera* (see p.315), the owners Pieter and Margarita – the true pioneers of tourism in Samaipata – will happily share their immense knowledge of the region with you.

There are no **banks** in Samaipata, though there are continual mutterings that one may eventually materialize in the coming years, so make sure you have enough money with you before you come. The **ENTEL** office is two blocks north of the Museo Archeológico, and there's also a card-operated phone booth on the Plaza Principal. **Internet access** is available at the main Entel office on the plaza. **Taxis** can be found at the taxi office (☎03/9446129 or 9446133) on Bolívar, a block north of the Plaza Principal.

Accommodation

Given its size, you are really spoilt for choice for **accommodation** in Samaipata. There are two categories: simple budget *alojamientos* in the centre of town where you can get a basic double room for less than $10, and more expensive rustic chalet-style *cabañas* on the outskirts of town, many of them family-size, with a kitchen and fireplace. Everything fills up (and prices go up) at weekends and on public holidays, particularly between October and April, when the heat and humidity in Santa Cruz drive many people to seek relief in Samaipata's cooler climate.

In town and around

Andoriña Calle Campero, east of the plaza. Ⓣ03/9446333, Ⓦwww.andorinasamaipata.com, Ⓔnoilenna@hotmail.com. Top-class hostel with comfy mattresses, spacious and relaxing communal areas (one with a projector for an in-hostel cinema) and the best breakfast in Samaipata. Andrés and Doriña are extremely helpful and are constantly thinking up new ways to make their already great hostel even better. ②

Cabañas Traudi Outside town, 800m south of the plaza Ⓣ03/9446094, Ⓔtraudiar@cotas.com.bo. A wide range of quirkily designed *cabañas* sleeping between two and eight people, with kitchen, private bathroom and fireplace, set amid spacious grounds with a large swimming pool and sauna. There are also smaller, cheaper double rooms with shared bathroom. ②–③

Guesthouse La Víspera Outside town, 1km south of the plaza Ⓣ03/9446082, Ⓦwww.lavispera.org, Ⓔlavispera@cotas.com.bo. Excellent Dutch-run place set amid a beautiful organic herb garden and fields with great views across the valley. Accommodation is either in comfortable, simply decorated two-person *cabañas* with kitchenette and shared bath, or two much larger *cabañas* that sleep up to ten people; there's also a campsite ($4 per person) with full bathroom and kitchen facilities and Internet access. They accept dollars and traveller's cheques. The delightful owners, Pieter and Margarita, are a wealth of information and enthusiasm. They also run the Boliviajes tour agency and a superb organic café-restaurant. ③–④

Landhaus A block west and four blocks north of the plaza Ⓣ03/9446033, Ⓔlandhaus@cotas.com.bo. Cosy, nicely decorated cabins sleeping between two and seven people, with fireplace, bathroom and kitchen, and smaller double rooms with private bath around a pleasant garden with outdoor seating, a small swimming pool and sauna, and a café. ④–⑤

Posada del Sol Three blocks up from the plaza Ⓣ03/9446218, Ⓦwww.bolivianromance.net, Ⓔbolivianromance@yahoo.com. Professionally run hostel with fantastic views and an extensive DVD collection. Owners Trent and Rosario will go out of their way to help you make the most of your stay. Rooms are clean and spacious and breakfast is good with excellent espresso coffee. Its sister hostel, the *Posada de la Plaza*, is a very similar homely setup just along from the plaza run by Tom and Denise. ②–③

Residencial Chelo Half a block east of the plaza Ⓣ03/9446014. Good-value little place with pleasant modern rooms (with private bath) around a plant-filled courtyard. ②

In the countryside

If the idea of having a base in the breathtaking **countryside** around Samaipata sounds appealing, there are a few remote and homely options.

The Banana Family Ⓦwww.bananafamily.com. A great place to relax with excellent home-cooked food. Israeli owners Tal and Dana have basic wood cabins as well as a campsite (also with tents available for hire) for about $8 per night, including three meals. ②

Gingers Paradise Ⓔelshaman@gmx.de. A working organic farm where owners Cristobal and Sol offer hearty meals and a host of activities, including handicraft sessions, horse riding and Quechua lessons. To find them, ask the bus driver to stop at Bermejo (about 76km from Santa Cruz on the road to Samaipata), cross the hanging bridge and walk about 250m up the path where you will see their multicoloured house. ②, including three meals and hot showers

El Refugio Los Volcanes *Los Volcanes* is a pleasant lodge situated about 75km along the road from Santa Cruz in a deep valley with spectacular views of lush forests and sandstone cliffs. The comfortable double rooms each come with a private bath. It's a great place for observing wildlife – over 200 bird species have been registered from the lodge. Booking in advance is recommended – contact one of the Santa Cruz agencies such as Forest Tours, or Ruta Verde. ⑤

The Town

The centre of Samaipata is the small **Plaza Principal**, about 800m southwest of the main road from Santa Cruz to Cochabamba and at the centre of the town's small grid of tranquil, unpaved streets, lined with pretty whitewashed houses under red-tiled roofs. Although generally quiet and peaceful, things can get busy (and noisy) with visiting Cruceños at weekends. A block north and two blocks east of the plaza on Bolívar, the **Museo Archeológico** (Mon–Sat 8.30am–12.30pm & 2.30–6.30pm, Sun 8.30am–4.30pm; $0.80, free if you have a ticket to El Fuerte) has a small collection of archeological finds from all over Bolivia, including some

Tour agencies in Samaipata

Samaipata's **tour agencies** make it easy to visit the surrounding area's less accessible attractions (some also offer English-speaking guides). Prices vary according to the number of people going on the trip: generally, for groups of three or more you'll pay under $20 per person for a day-trip to La Yunga or La Pajcha; for longer treks, expect to pay around $25 per person per day, with food and camping equipment included.

Boliviajes *Guesthouse La Vispera* ⓣ03/9446082, ⓦwww.travelxs.com/agents/boliviajes. Long-established Dutch-run agency with expert knowledge of the region and multilingual guides, specializing in trekking in the Parque Nacional Amboró and the mountains south of Samaipata. Treks range from a five-hour walk to El Fuerte to an eighteen-day trans-Amboró trek to Buena Vista – a hardcore wilderness expedition – and the Condor Hike (see p.319). They also organize trips throughout Bolivia for international clients, and hire horses and rent camping equipment.

Don Gilberto Aguilera Calle Sucre ⓣ03/9446050. Samaipata's most experienced trekking guide, Don Gilberto is the man to go with if you want an off-the-beaten-track adventure in the cloudforest north of Samaipata. If you speak Spanish, go with him.

Michael Blendinger Nature Tours Calle Bolivar, opposite the museum ⓣ03/9446227, ⓦwww.discoveringbolivia.com, ⓔmblendinger@cotas.com.bo. Multilingual guides with highly professional approach and knowledge. Offering two- to five-day trips on the Che Guevara trail as well as Amboró and tailor-made trips further afield, including Noel Kempff and the Pantanal.

Roadrunners Bolívar ⓣ03/9446193, ⓔtheroadrunners@hotmail.com. A very friendly, enthusiastic and efficient German-run agency with English-speaking guides leading frequent trips to La Yunga in the Parque Nacional Amboró, El Fuerte and La Pajcha. They also organize longer trips into Amboró or following in the footsteps of Che Guevara.

beautiful Inca carved wooden ceremonial *chicha*-drinking cups known as *kerus*; Inca stone axes and mace heads; and a range of pottery from various different cultures. Disappointingly, however, there's very little on display related to El Fuerte other than some wooden pillars, a scale model of the site and a few old plans. Along Sucre from the plaza is the beautifully laid-back **Carmen Luz Art** (open most days), where an array of artwork from local craftspeople is on sale, including dolls' houses, images of Che Guevara and Carmen Luz's own work. Carmen, an extremely charismatic artist, lives at the back of the gallery and is always happy to share a well-travelled tale or two.

Eating

Samaipata's status as a resort town and its significant international community ensure a varied range of **restaurants and cafés**, though some only open at weekends. At the **market**, a block south of the Plaza Principal, you can get coffee, juices and cheese *empanadas* from early in the morning and hearty basic soups and inexpensive meals until mid-afternoon. This is also the place to come for fruit, vegetables and other picnic provisions; alternatively, try the *Panadería Gerlinde*, a German **bakery** at the north end of town on the main road, where you can get excellent fresh bread, biscuits and pasta as well as home-made jam and good cheeses and sausages.

Café Latina A block north and three blocks east of the plaza at Bolívar 3. The best food in town and a good place to meet other travellers. The charming owners Lenny and Sylvain have created a sophisticated atmosphere and serve ice-cold beer, a selection of wines and tasty food, including very good pasta dishes.

Moving on from Samaipata

Moving on from Samaipata, **micros to Santa Cruz** leave early each morning from the Plaza Principal, while faster, more regular and only slightly more expensive **trufis** leave throughout the day when full from the gasoline station (*surtidor*) at the entrance to town. If you're heading to Vallegrande or Sucre, you can flag down a through bus from the main road opposite the gasoline station. Those for **Vallegrande** pass through in the afternoon and always stop for passengers; those for **Sucre** pass through in the evening but are often full and don't always stop. You've a better chance of getting on one if you take a taxi to Mairana, 16km west, where the buses stop for dinner; alternatively, for a small fee Roadrunners tour agency will buy a ticket for you in advance from Santa Cruz. There's no regular transport between Santa Cruz and **Cochabamba** along this road: you'll either have to try to find a truck to take you, or catch a bus to Vallegrande and get another bus from there – either way, it's almost certainly quicker to return to Santa Cruz.

La Chakana Plaza Principal. Small European-run café serving good juices, coffee and snacks. The vegetarian set *almuerzo* is good value at around $2.50. They have a small book exchange on offer and a useful folder of tourist information.

Descanso en las Alturas Two blocks north and three blocks west of the plaza. Argentine restaurant (also known as the *Chancho Rengo*), offering large pizzas with tasty, imaginative toppings ($5), and big, juicy *churrascos* ($3).

Guesthouse La Víspera (see p.315). If you don't choose to stay here, try at least to go and sample the excellent, organic bistro housed on a delightful garden patio where, as well as admiring the spectacular views, you can watch the ingredients for your meal being gathered from the surrounding gardens. Also serves Bolivia's finest tea and scones.

Landhaus A block west and four blocks north of the plaza. Excellent German restaurant with attractive rustic decor serving delicious and mainly European food, including very good steak, lasagne and pork dishes ($5–6). There's also a raucous late-night disco on Saturdays. Open Thurs–Sun only.

Mosquito Rock Café Two blocks north and three blocks west uphill from the plaza, above *Descanso en las Alturas*. Popular German-owned bar lovingly decorated with heavy rock and motor-racing memorabilia – there's even a car on the roof. It's a great place for a cold beer or cocktail (though avoid the *caipiriñas*). Open Thurs–Sat 10pm–late.

La Vaca Loca Calle Sucre, on the main plaza. Welcoming café-restaurant which serves wholesome dishes for lunch and dinner and good ice cream.

Around Samaipata

Without doubt **El Fuerte** is an important and intriguing attraction of Samaipata, but too many tourists see nothing else before they shuffle back to the bright lights of Santa Cruz. The opportunities to explore the surrounding countryside are immense in this beautiful region of rugged, forested mountains divided by lush valleys whose lower slopes are covered by rich farmland, where hummingbirds, condors and flocks of green parakeets are a frequent sight. The low mountains surrounding Samaipata make for excellent hiking – just follow any of the paths or tracks leading out of town. For access to the Samaipata section of nearby **Parque Nacional Amboró**, see p.311.

El Fuerte

About 9km east of Samaipata, the archeological complex known as **El Fuerte** (daily 9am–5pm; $3) is amongst the most striking and enigmatic ancient sites in the Andes. At the centre of the complex lies a great sandstone rock carved with

▲ El Fuerte

a fantastic variety of abstract and figurative designs, including animals and geometric shapes. The rock is surrounded by the remains of more than fifty Inca buildings (and more are being discovered in ongoing archeological investigations), but the carvings predate Inca occupation of the region by over two thousand years. The site's original indigenous name has been lost – the Spanish name El Fuerte, meaning "the fort", reveals more about the military obsession of the Spanish conquistadors than it does about the primary purpose of the site, which was clearly religious and ceremonial.

It's thought the first carvings were made before 1000 BC by an ancient lowland people who were perhaps driven from the region by the **Chiriguanos** – a collective name given to those from the eastern Chaco. The Chiriguanos arrived here in force in the fifteenth century after migrating across the Chaco from the lands east of the Río Paraguay. It is believed that they might also have considered this an important ceremonial centre. The **Incas** arrived here around the same time, occupying the site, which served as an administrative and military outpost at the easternmost fringes of their empire. They altered and embellished the rock itself, suggesting that they too considered it a sacred site – though, like the Spanish, they had a habit of appropriating the religious centres of conquered peoples as a means of reinforcing their domination. Archeological evidence shows the Inca occupation occurred in two distinct periods, suggesting the outpost may have been overrun and destroyed by Chiriguano raiders before being re-established. The site was then occupied by the Spanish and their indigenous allies in the 1570s during their border war with the Chiriguanos, and eventually abandoned when the town of Samaipata was founded in the early seventeenth century.

The site

The easiest way to reach El Fuerte is to take a **taxi** from Samaipata (about $5 one way, or $8 return with an hour's waiting time) or go on a **guided tour** with one of the Samaipata tour agencies. Otherwise, you can walk to the ruins in about two hours – just follow the road out of Samaipata towards Santa Cruz for a few kilometres, then turn right up the marked side road that climbs to the site. Most visitors find that an hour is enough time to appreciate the ruins, though others linger much longer.

Set on a hilltop at just under 2000m above sea level, with commanding views of the surrounding mountains and the valley below, **the rock** itself is a huge lump of reddish sandstone measuring 160m long and up to 40m wide. Its entire surface has been sculpted and carved with all manner of figurative and abstract designs, including pumas, serpents, birds, lines, steps and niches. Sadly, past vandalism and the inevitable erosion mean that visitors are no longer allowed to walk on the rock. Even so, by following the path that runs around the outside you can get a reasonable look at the carvings.

On the **westernmost end** of the rock you can still make out two circular carvings, 2m in diameter, of pumas or jaguars, and one of a coiled serpent. Beyond this is a series of square indentations and a low Inca wall with numerous niches, behind which are two long, parallel slots running exactly west to east with zigzags down either side and in the centre: the controversial New Age amateur archeologist Erich von Daniken has suggested this was a launching ramp for extraterrestrial spacecraft, but in fact it's more likely to have been used for ritual libations of *chicha* or blood.

A path runs along the **south side** of the rock, which is carved with stone steps, platforms, seats and niches of all shapes and sizes, including classic Inca trapezoids 2m high, all facing due south: these probably once held idols and the mummified bodies of long-dead Inca priests and officials. On your right as you walk round are the foundations of several Inca stone buildings that may have housed priests and other attendants, and the remains of a small sixteenth-century Spanish building. Walking round to the **north face** of rock you'll find a low Inca wall, five massive north-facing niches cut out of the rock face, and a good view of the surface of the rock, here carved with recesses and channels. **East of the rock** a path leads down to the ruins of a building with commanding views of the valley below, then on to the foundations of a classic Inca *cancha* (living compound), where archeologists have also found post holes from wooden houses and ceramic fragments suggesting an earlier, possibly Chiriguano occupation of the site.

From the rock's east end, a path runs downhill to the south, reaching a broad terrace. From here, the path continues 200m to **La Chinkana**, a deep well that has inspired improbable myths of underground tunnels leading to faraway Inca sites. Returning to the terrace and turning right brings you to the site's main complex of Inca buildings. Passing the foundations of several ruined buildings, you emerge on a broad plaza measuring about 100m by 150m and flanked on three sides by partially overgrown Inca ruins of which only low walls or foundations now remain.

South of Samaipata

About 40km south of Samaipata on the road towards the village of Postrer Valle, a path leads 6km or so to **La Pajcha**, a beautiful triple-tiered waterfall that plunges 30m into a cool pool which is excellent for swimming. There's no public transport, so you'll either have to come by taxi and arrange to be picked up later, or go on an organized trip with one of the Samaipata tour agencies. The nearby **Condor Hike** is also best with a guide. It offers a fantastic opportunity to observe these gigantic birds with wingspans of up to 3m at sometimes frighteningly close quarters. The hike takes about five hours and it's about a two-and-a-half-hour drive (each way) to the start of the Condor trail. Bus trips

Community-based ecotourism

The Santa-Cruz-based NGO, **PROBIOMA**, 29 Calle 7 Este, Barrio Equipetrol (ⓣ03/3431332, ⓦwww.probioma.org.bo, ⓔecoturismo@probioma.org.bo), is an excellent place to contact if you would like to ensure that your stay in the Santa Cruz region benefits the communities that live there. PROBIOMA is a non-profit organization that links tourists to communities without – unlike tour operators offering similar deals – taking a cut of the money. The projects it promotes are managed and run by local communities, ensuring that the money goes to help the community as a whole. Also, the surrounding environment is protected as tourism provides an economic alternative to damaging practices such as logging, or exhaustive farming techniques.

One of the most successful of these sites is **Los Volcanes** on the south side of Amboró, where you can camp or stay in one of the comfortable cabins – constructed with local materials and workmanship. It is reached by an eight-kilometre trek along the Rio Colorado from Bermejoo, about 40km east of Samaipata on the Santa Cruz road. Situated to the North of Amboró, **Villa Amboró** and **Isama** are both great centres for hiking and observing wildlife. There is also a project in **El Chochis** (see p.342), and another is being set up in the **Pantanal**.

A stay in one of these sites will cost about $35 a day, including food and expert guides. Phone or email PROBIOMA, or drop by their Santa Cruz office to arrange a stay in one of these sites, or learn more about the work they are doing.

from Samaipata leave before 7am. About 20km east of Samaipata, a set of three waterfalls, **Cascadas la Cuevas**, is a very accessible option (about $4 each way in a taxi) for seeing a little more of the countryside when you're pushed for time. You can swim in the pools which makes it very popular with local families.

Vallegrande

Some 68km west of Samaipata on the old road from Santa Cruz to Cochabamba, a side road leads 53km south to **VALLEGRANDE**, a pleasant market town set in a broad valley at an altitude of just over 2000m. A peaceful backwater founded as a Spanish outpost in 1612, Vallegrande leapt briefly to the world's attention in 1967, when the arid region of low mountains and broken hills to the south of the town became the scene of a doomed guerrilla campaign led by the famous Argentine communist and hero of the Cuban revolution, **Ernesto "Che" Guevara** (see box, p.322). Vallegrande served as the headquarters of the Bolivian army's successful counter-insurgency campaign; after Che was captured and executed on October 9 in the hamlet of La Higuera, about 50km to the south, his body was flown here strapped to the skids of a helicopter and put on display in the town hospital.

What happened next remained a closely guarded secret for the next 28 years, until the Bolivian general Mario Vargas Salinas revealed that **Che's body** – minus his hands, which were amputated for identification purposes – had been buried by night in an unmarked pit near the airstrip on the edge of town, to prevent his grave from becoming a place of pilgrimage. After a year and a half of investigation, in 1997 his remains, along with those of several of his guerrilla comrades, were found by a team of Cuban and Argentine forensic scientists and flown to Cuba, where they were re-interred in a specially built mausoleum on the outskirts of the city of Santa Clara, the scene of his greatest victory in the Cuban revolutionary war. Today, Che's erstwhile grave and the hamlet of La Higuera, where his dreams of leading a continent-wide revolution ended in defeat and death, attract a steady trickle of pilgrims, but, unless you share their veneration of the charismatic revolutionary icon, there's little reason to come here.

The Town

The centre of Vallegrande is the peaceful and spacious Plaza 26 de Enero, on the southeast side of which the municipal Casa de Cultura houses a small **museum** (Mon–Fri 10am–noon, 3–5pm & 7–9pm, Sat & Sun 10am–noon; $0.80), which has an unexciting collection of local archeological finds. Here you can sign up for the key to visit Che's burial site and the laundry room behind the hospital for a small fee ($1.25). There's also an upstairs room dedicated to Che, with plenty of photographs of him and his guerrilla comrades in camp; of Bolivian soldiers hunting them down; of their bullet-ridden corpses; and of the emotional ceremonies held in La Higuera to mark the thirtieth anniversary of Che's death. Next door there is a guide office where locals are usually more than happy to show you around and share their stories of Che. Three blocks south of the plaza on Calle Señor de Malta, you can visit the hospital of the same name to have a look at the laundry room where Che's body was put on gruesome display to the world's press, though there's nothing to see today – at the time, word that he bore a striking resemblance to Jesus Christ spread quickly, and local women cut locks from his hair as good-luck charms.

Che's former grave is on the edge of the airstrip on the outskirts of town, a short taxi ride or a ten-minute walk from the plaza: head northeast up Calle Santa Cruz, then turn right when you reach the "La Tradición" fiesta venue and head east until you reach the airstrip and a fork in the road. Take the left fork that runs alongside the airstrip and you'll see a sign just before the cemetery with a silhouette of Che's head and an arrow pointing to the left: 100m away behind the cemetery (and thus not on consecrated ground) you'll find the grave from which his remains and those of six other guerrillas were exhumed in 1997. The pit has been left open and is now covered with an unfinished red-tiled brick and concrete mausoleum, decorated with cheap plastic wreaths and scribbled on with tributes left by visitors; a simple wooden cross at one end bears the slogan "Por la Solidaridad, la Libertad y la Justicia" – for solidarity, liberty and justice. If you return to the fork in the road and walk up the right side you'll reach a house on the right with an unused swimming pool, behind which are four pits where the bodies of many of Che's mostly Cuban and Bolivian guerrilla comrades were buried after being killed in combat or executed after capture, each now marked by a stone plaque listing the names of those once buried there and the date and place of their deaths.

Ask around in the main square to see if there any copies of the film *Di Buen día a papá* (Say Good Morning to Dad) for sale. Filmed in Vallegrande and La Higuera in 2004, the documentary tells the story of Che, including the exhumation of his remains in 1997.

Practicalities

Daily **buses** from Santa Cruz via Samaipata arrive and depart from the offices of two different bus companies: Trans Vallegrande on Santa Cruz with Florida, two blocks southeast of Plaza 26 de Enero, and Trans Señor de los Milagros, a block further southeast on Florida. Buses leave for Santa Cruz at 8am, 1pm and 9pm. Twice-weekly buses to and from Cochabamba (leaving Mon at 6pm and Fri at 7.30am, and returning from Cochabamba on Wed at 6.30pm and Sat at 6.30pm) arrive and depart from the office of Expreso Guadelupe, also on Santa Cruz with Florida. The best **place to stay** is the good-value *Sede Residencial Ganadera* (☎03/9422176; ②), a block northeast of the plaza at Bolívar 115, which has clean, spacious modern rooms with private bath and breakfast included. Cheaper and more basic rooms with shared bath can be found at the *Residencial Vallegrande* (☎03/9422281; ②) and *Alojamiento Teresita* (☎03/9422151; ②), both just off the plaza on calles Sucre and Escalante y Mendoza respectively. A more upmarket option is *Hostal Juanita* (☎03/9422231; ④) on Calle Caballero. Near the market on Calle Santa Cruz with Florida, the *Hotel Santa Cruz* is another friendly upmarket option with in-house Internet.

The life and death of Ernesto “Che” Guevara

Of all the romantics and adventurers to pass through Bolivia, none has matched the iconic status of **Che Guevara**, the Argentine-born hero of the Cuban revolution who was killed in the backwoods southwest of Santa Cruz while attempting to launch a continent-wide guerrilla war. Born in the Argentine town of Rosario to upper middle-class parents on May 14, 1928 (though his birth was registered a month later to conceal the fact that he was conceived before his parents were married), Ernesto Guevara de la Serna studied medicine at the University of Buenos Aires and qualified in 1953, but never practised as a doctor in his homeland: he preferred life on the road as a self-styled vagabond and adventurer, travelling virtually penniless throughout Latin America both during and after his studies, including a brief period in Bolivia during the revolutionary upheaval of the early 1950s.

By 1954 his travels brought him to **Guatemala**, where he witnessed the CIA-backed military overthrow of the progressive Arbenz regime, an event that confirmed both his growing commitment to revolutionary Marxism and his fervent opposition to US imperialism. It was also here that he was given the nickname **Che**, after his typically Argentine habit of peppering his speech with the Guaraní-derived word, used to mean “hey you” or “mate”. From Guatemala he headed to Mexico City, where he met **Fidel Castro**, an exiled Cuban rebel planning to return to his country to launch a guerrilla campaign to overthrow the dictator Fulgencio Batista. Che was signed up as the expedition’s doctor. Within days of landing on Cuba’s southern coast, the rebels walked into an ambush, which proved an epiphany for Che. Under heavy fire, with comrades falling dead and wounded around him, he faced a split-second decision over whether to rescue a medicine box or an ammunition case. He chose the latter, his instincts as a fighter overcoming his training as a doctor. Over the next two years of fighting, Che proved himself amongst the most ruthless, determined, fearless, politically radical and tactically astute of the guerrilla commanders. By the time Fidel Castro took power in January 1959, Che was one of his closest associates. For several years he served Cuba as president of the National Bank, roving ambassador and Minister of Industry. His mixture of good looks, incendiary rhetoric and self-sacrifice made him appear the living embodiment of the revolutionary “New Man”.

However, his radicalism and his continued insistence on promoting revolution in other countries proved a liability to Castro’s Soviet allies, who feared being drawn into a war with the US and were suspicious of Che’s Maoist leanings. Che saw the Cuban revolution as the first step in a continent-wide revolution against US imperial control, and believed the guerrilla strategy used in Cuba – whereby a small rural *foco* or nucleus of determined fighters could radicalize the peasantry and create the conditions for revolution, as detailed in his book *Guerra de Guerrillas* – was a scientific model that could be exported all over the world. In 1965 he formally resigned his Cuban citizenship, ministerial position and rank of *commandante*, left his family behind and set off to spread revolution. After an unsuccessful stint leading a Cuban guerrilla contingent supporting rebels in the **Congo**, he turned his attention to Bolivia, Good **food** is served up at the German-run *El Mirador* (open lunch and dinner most days), overlooking the town from the top of Escalante y Mendoza, which offers a daily changing selection of tasty beef, pork chicken and trout dishes for about $2–3; also good is the *Churasqueria El Gaucho*, just off the plaza on Señor de Malta, where massive slabs of Argentine-style steak with all the trimmings go for about $3. Also good is *Café Santa Clara*, on the plaza, which offers an excellent *pique macho*, and the café also serves as a showroom for portraits and scenes of Che, all painted by the owner. *La Chachina* is also a great pork restaurant on Calle Florida which opens from 6pm to late at night for good sandwiches and inexpensive chorizo. There are plenty of other simple and

where he hoped to start a guerrilla conflagration that would spread into neighbouring countries (including his native Argentina) and draw the US into a "second Vietnam", culminating in a continent-wide revolution. Bolivia's rugged terrain, strategic position in the centre of the continent and proximity to Argentina made it an attractive location, though in fact the choice was to prove a fatal mistake – in all South America, Bolivia was the only country where radical land reform had already been carried out, and so the revolutionary potential of the peasantry was low.

In 1966, Che set off to Bolivia with a few chosen Cuban companions and set up his base at Ñancahuasu, a farm on the fringes of the Chaco in the Andean foothills, 260km southwest of Santa Cruz. In hindsight, Che's Bolivian venture was doomed from the start. Opposed to Che's guerrilla strategy and anxious to run things on its own territory, the Bolivian Communist party quickly withdrew its support. The few Bolivian recruits he did manage to enlist proved unreliable and squabbled with the Cubans, and the guerrillas' presence was betrayed by deserters even before initial preparations were complete. Unable to attract a single recruit from the local peasantry, Che's small band (they never numbered more than fifty) quickly found itself on the run, divided into two groups blundering through harsh terrain with little food or water while the Bolivian army, backed by US military trainers and CIA advisers, closed in from all sides. Without sufficient medicine, Che himself was crippled by the asthma that had plagued him all his life, and reduced to travelling by donkey. On September 26, 1967, Che's ragged fighters marched through the hamlet of **La Higuera**, straight into an army ambush in which three guerrillas were instantly killed. Che and the sixteen other survivors retreated into a canyon, the **Quebrada del Churo**, where they were quickly surrounded. On October 8 they were captured by a company of elite US-trained Bolivian Army Rangers. In the ensuing shoot-out, Che was hit in the calf; another bullet destroyed his carbine, and he was captured. Filthy and emaciated, he was taken to La Higuera and held in the schoolhouse for interrogation by Bolivian army officers and a Cuban-born CIA agent. The next day, the order to execute Che came through from the Bolivian high command. His dreams of a continent-wide revolution were ended by two bursts from a semi-automatic rifle fired by a sergeant who volunteered for the task. According to legend, Che's last words were: "Shoot, coward, you are only going to kill a man."

His body was flown to **Vallegrande** and displayed to the press before being secretly buried, as if his enemies feared him more in death than in life. In many ways, they were right to do so, as Che's example inspired thousands of young men and women across Latin America. In his last public message, recorded before he left Cuba, Che appeared to predict this: "Wherever death may surprise us," he said, "let it be welcome, provided that this, our battle cry, may have reached some receptive ears and another hand may be extended to wield our weapon and other men may be ready to intone the funeral dirge with the staccato singing of machine guns and new battle cries of war and victory."

inexpensive places to eat on Calle Chaco near the covered **market**, which as usual is good for fresh fruit juices, coffee and *empanandas* from early in the morning. The **ENTEL** office is just off the plaza on Bolívar, and there's **Internet access** on the main plaza and Calle Santa Cruz. Several shops on Chaco change cash dollars, but not traveller's cheques.

La Higuera and around

LA HIGUERA, the hamlet where Che Guevara met his end, lies about 50km south of Vallegrande, a two- to three-hour drive drive along a rough dirt road via the slightly larger village of Pucará. Set in a region of low, crumpled mountains covered in scrubby vegetation broken by occasional maize and potato fields, La Higuera is a miserable collection of simple adobe houses with tiled roofs, many of them scrawled with revolutionary slogans. Two **monuments** commemorate the fallen guerrilla leader. The most recent is a large, well-made bronze bust of Che, erected in 1997 on the thirtieth anniversary of his death. The other is a small, roughly fashioned plaster bust which has been destroyed three times by the Bolivian army over the years, and replaced each time by local sympathizers. The schoolhouse where Che was executed is now a medical post: ask around and you should be able to find someone with a key, though there's nothing to see inside. Most locals are happy to share their reminiscences of events in 1967, even those far too young to have been there; if you ask around you'll probably find someone willing to guide you to the **Quebrada del Churo**, the ravine a few kilometres away where Che was captured.

There's also a one-room **Museo Historico del Che** (Thurs & Sun; $0.80), which has the atmosphere of a shrine, complete with relics including Che's machete; the wooden chair where he sat for the last time; bullets, ammo clips and a rifle used by the other guerrillas or their military pursuers. There's also a map of the campaign; plenty of photos and newspaper cuttings; and lots of leaflets and pamphlets donated by Che sympathizers. A local guide is always available at the museum and will know a great deal about the failed guerrilla campaign. On October 8–9 each year there's a small gathering of revolutionaries and other sympathizers who come to commemorate Che's death.

A daily bus leaves at 8am from Calle Señor de Malta to the sleepy village of **PUCARÁ**, which enjoys sweeping views of the Rio Grande valley and a picturesque colonial architecture that gives it a certain charm. There are also a number of area hikes from here that locals will be more than glad to point out to you.

Practicalities

To reach La Higuera from Vallegrande you can either take a **taxi**, which should cost around $20 round trip, or go by **lorry** ($2.50 return) – these leave most days from Calle Señor de Malta early in the morning, returning the next day. On Thursdays and Sundays, Rene Villegas drives his lorry there and returns the same day; he also runs the museum, which only opens when he's in town, so this is really the best way to visit – trips can be arranged by calling him on ☎03/9422003. There are two options for **accommodation** in La Higuera; French-owned *Posada de la Telegrafista* (② a night with a hot shower); or a basic community hostel at the side of the plaza (①) Alternatively, you can camp, or you may be able to persuade one of the locals to put you up; a basic shop sells soft drinks, tinned food and biscuits, but there are no restaurants. From Pucará between Vallegrande and La Higuera, irregular pick-up trucks carry passengers to the town of **Villa Serrano**, 100km or so further south, where there's basic accommodation and buses most days west to Sucre (7–8hr), making a scenic alternative route out for more adventurous travellers. If you have time, Pucará itself makes a pleasant stopoff.

Chiquitos: the Jesuit missions

East of Santa Cruz stretches a vast, sparsely populated plain broken by occasional low rocky ridges and covered in scrub and fast-disappearing dry tropical forest, which gradually gives way to swamp as it approaches the border with Brazil. Named **Chiquitos** by the Spanish (apparently because the original indigenous inhabitants lived in houses with low doorways – *chiquito* means small), in the eighteenth century this region was the scene of one of the most extraordinary episodes in Spanish colonial history, as a handful of Jesuit priests established a series of flourishing **mission towns** where the previously hostile indigenous inhabitants of the region, known as Chiquitanos, converted to Catholicism and settled in their thousands, adopting European agricultural techniques and building some of the most magnificent colonial churches in South America. This theocratic socialist utopia ended in 1767, when the Spanish crown expelled the Jesuit order from the Americas, allowing their indigenous charges to be exploited by settlers from Santa Cruz, who seized the Chiquitanos's lands and took many of them into forced servitude; the region has been in a state of economic decline ever since. Six of the ten Jesuit **mission churches** still survive, however, and have now been restored to their original magnificence and recognized as UNESCO World Heritage Sites – their incongruous splendour in the midst of the wilderness is one of the most remarkable sights in Bolivia.

The six missions can be visited in a five- to seven-day loop by road and rail from Santa Cruz. From the city a rough road runs northeast to **San Javier** and **Concepción**, then continues to **San Ignacio** (from where the churches of San Miguel, San Rafael and Santa Ana can all be visited by taxi in a day). From San Ignacio, the road heads south to **San José**, the easternmost of the surviving missions, which is on the railway line between Santa Cruz and the Brazilian border at Quijarro. Buses connect all these mission towns as far as San José, from where you can get the train back to Santa Cruz or continue east to the Brazilian border. Alternatively, you could travel the loop counter-clockwise, starting from San José and returning to Santa Cruz by road via the other mission towns – indeed, transport links are slightly more convenient going in this direction, as you avoid having to catch a bus in the middle of the night from Concepción to San Ignacio, as well as the hassle of getting a seat on the train back to Santa Cruz from San José.

San Javier

Some 220km northeast of Santa Cruz, **SAN JAVIER** is the westernmost of the Chiquitos Jesuit mission towns and was the first to be established in the region, having been founded in 1691 by Father José de Arce. A collection of low, white-washed houses strung out along the dusty main road, San Javier is now a quiet cattle-ranching centre with a pleasant enough setting but no real attractions other than the mission church itself, the **Iglesia de San Javier** (daily 8am–7pm; $0.30), which stands on the plaza, a block north of the road. Completed in 1752 under the direction of Martin Schmidt, the formidable

The utopian kingdom of the Jesuits in Chiquitos

When the Spanish first arrived in what is now eastern Bolivia, the vast, forest-covered plains between the Río Grande and the Río Paraguay were densely populated by up to fifty different indigenous groups, each speaking a distinct language. To the Spaniards this was a strategically vital region, providing a link between the silver of the Andes and the settlements in Paraguay and the Río de la Plata. Even so, a century of constant military expeditions across the region failed to subdue the indigenous population – known collectively as the **Chiquitanos** – who proved themselves amongst the fiercest enemies the conquistadors had yet encountered.

In exasperation, at the end of the seventeenth century the colonial authorities in Santa Cruz turned to the **Jesuits** to pacify the region and secure the empire's frontier. By this time the Jesuits had more than a century of missionary experience in South America, and were quick to implement the missionary strategy that had proved successful elsewhere. Small groups of dedicated priests set out to convert the indigenous peoples and persuade them to settle in missions known as *reducciones*, places where they could be brought together and "reduced" to European "civilization", which included being converted to Catholicism. Though many missionaries met gruesome deaths at the hands of those they sought to convert, the different tribal groups of Chiquitania quickly flocked to join the new settlements, which offered them many advantages. After a century of war, many had anyway been seeking a peaceful accommodation with the colonial regime, and under the aegis of the Jesuits they were protected from the rapacious slave raids of the Spaniards in Santa Cruz and the Portuguese in Brazil, as well as from their own tribal enemies.

Ten **missions** flourished under the Jesuit regime. European livestock and crops were successfully introduced, producing great food surpluses; the Chiquitanos had limited autonomy under their own councils or *cabildos*, and were taught in their own languages (one of these, Chiquitano, was eventually adopted as the main language in all the missions); indigenous craftsmen were trained in European techniques and built huge churches whose sheer magnificence served as an effective tool in the conversion of other tribes; European musical instruments were introduced and quickly mastered by the Chiquitanos, establishing a musical tradition that survives to this day. Admittedly, the missions were not quite the autonomous socialist utopia Jesuit sympathizers have since tried to make out – many indigenous people were brought in by force, using methods little different from those of the slavers of Santa Cruz, and the political and ideological control exercised by the fathers was pretty much absolute – but in general the missions provided a far more benign regime than anything else on offer under Spanish rule.

In the end, though, for all their self-sufficiency and autonomy, the Jesuit missions were utterly dependent on the Spanish colonial authorities. When in 1767 political developments in far-off Europe led the Spanish king to order the Jesuits out of the Americas, the fathers meekly concurred, and the Chiquitanos were quickly subjected to forced labour and the seizure of their best lands by the settlers of Santa Cruz. Within a few decades the missions were a shadow of their former selves, and this decline has continued pretty much ever since, leaving only the beautiful mission **churches**, now restored to their full glory with European aid money, to testify to the missions' former prosperity.

Swiss Jesuit priest, musician and architect who was responsible for several of the Chiquitos mission churches (and immaculately restored between 1987 and 1993 under the guidance of the equally dedicated Swiss Jesuit architect Hans Roth), the church is a massive, barn-like structure with a squat, sloping roof supported by huge spiralled wooden pillars hewn from single tree trunks, with a simple Baroque plaster facade painted in muted shades of light brown and barley-sugar orange. Above the doorway a Latin inscription common to most Jesuit mission churches in Bolivia reads *Domus Dei et Porta Coeli* (House of God and Gateway to Heaven); above this a wooden beam is carved with a dedication to Saint Francis Xavier in Chiquitano.

On the right side of the church as you face it a doorway leads into a cloistered **courtyard**, inside which is the freestanding bell tower, again supported by four massive carved tree trunks, with a spiral stairway up the middle. At the far end of the courtyard are the parish offices (*secretaria*), where you can find someone to open the church for you if necessary, and pay the entrance fee. **Inside**, the church roof is supported by sixteen great spiralled pillars, painted with simple Baroque floral patterns in muted shades of brown and orange and decorated with wooden statues of angels. Carved and painted by local craftsmen, the exquisite modern wooden retablo behind the altar features beautiful carved scenes from the Bible and of the Jesuit missionaries at work in Chiquitos. In the bottom left panel an image of St Peter crucified upside down is surrounded by scenes of black-robed Jesuits being gruesomely martyred by indigenous warriors, their names held aloft by worried-looking cherubs, while other tribesmen are led off in chains from a burning mission by armed European slavers; the bottom right panel shows the missionaries Martin Schmidt and Juan Messner playing piano and violin alongside a Chiquitano choir and accompanied by angels with trumpet and mandolin, while the Jesuit linguist Ignacio Chomé teaches other Chiquitanos to write in the sand. The IHS inside the flaming sun at the top of the retablo stands for "Jesus Saviour of Man" in Latin: combined with three nails and a crucifix, this is the symbol of the Jesuit order, and you'll see it painted and engraved on mission buildings throughout Chiquitos.

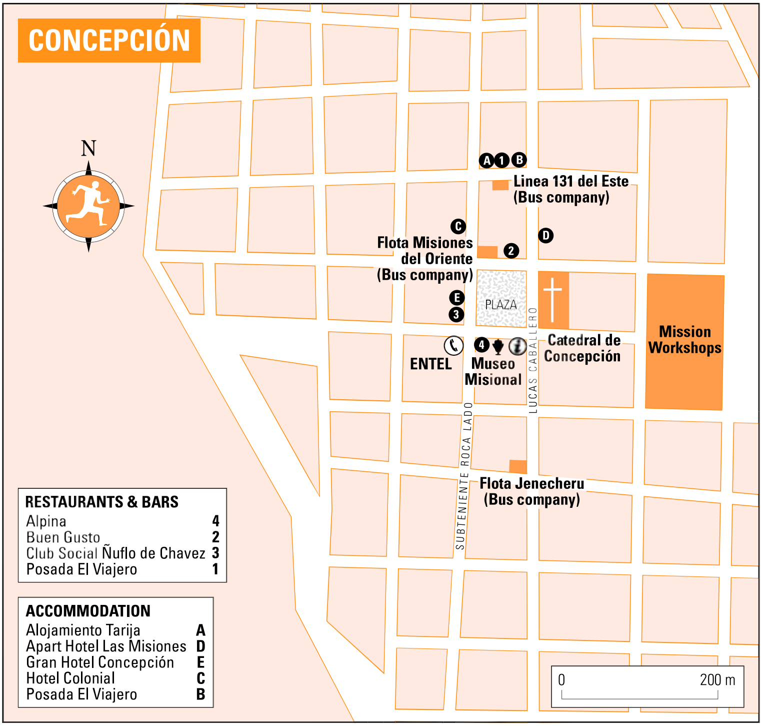
The church is now run by the Franciscan order, which works closely with the Chiquitano communities of the surrounding region and has re-introduced the indigenous *cabildo*, or semi-autonomous local council; the Masses every weekday evening at 6.30pm and on Sunday mornings are usually well attended. Postcards, leaflets and several books by the parish priest – including a Chiquitano–Spanish dictionary – are on sale in the parish office.

Practicalities

Buses to and from Santa Cruz arrive and depart from the offices of Linea 131 del Este on the main road through town; through buses travelling in either direction pick up and drop off passengers here. If you just want to visit the church you could easily come here on the first bus in the morning from Concepción or Santa Cruz, spend an hour or two looking around, then catch another bus onwards. If you want **to stay** the night, there are a couple of good budget options: the *Alojamiento San Javier* (Ⓣ03/9635038; ❷), on the main road, has simple but clean rooms with shared bath around a peaceful garden; the equally pleasant *Alojamiento Amé Tauna* (Ⓣ03/9635018; ❷–❸), on the plaza facing the church, offers a choice of shared or private bath. The best **places to eat** are the reasonably priced *Restaurante El Turista* and *Restaurante Ganadero*, both on the plaza; the former has an array of good Bolivian fare, including good, homely stew dishes, while the latter does very good steaks, and there are several other inexpensive restaurants on the main road through town, where you'll also find the ENTEL telephone office.

Concepción

About 68km to the east, the former mission town of **CONCEPCIÓN** is slightly larger than San Javier, but in all other respects a similarly sleepy agricultural backwater dominated by cattle ranching. The mission was founded in 1709


CONCEPCIÓN
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Museo Misional
Catedral de Concepción
Mission Workshops
LUCAS CABALLERO
SUBTENIENTE ROCA LADO
Flota Jenecheru (Bus company)
RESTAURANTS & BARS
Alpina 4
Buen Gusto 2
Club Social Ñuflo de Chavez 3
Posada El Viajero 1
ACCOMMODATION
Alojamiento Tarija A
Apart Hotel Las Misiones D
Gran Hotel Concepción E
Hotel Colonial C
Posada El Viajero B
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by Father Lucas Caballero, a Jesuit missionary who was killed two years later by the Puyzocas tribe, which latter settled here. At the centre of town is a broad plaza lined with single-storey whitewashed adobe houses with tiled roofs that extend over the pavement, a colonial architectural style introduced after the expulsion of the Jesuits, when the town was taken over by mestizos from Santa Cruz and the long communal houses built for the Chiquitanos were gradually replaced. In the middle of the square stands a simple wooden cross, surrounded by four palm trees – originally a feature of all the mission compounds.

Catedral de Concepción

The town's mission church, now the **Catedral de Concepción** (daily 7am–8pm; free), stands on the east side of the plaza: a massive barn-like structure with an overhanging roof supported by 121 colossal tree-trunk columns, and with a separate, similarly supported bell tower. Originally designed by Martin Schmidt and completed in 1756, it was the first Jesuit church in Chiquitos to be restored, and is the most extravagantly decorated of them all, with a lavishly painted facade decorated with golden Baroque floral designs, angels, and two images of the Virgin Mary on either side of the door. The **interior** is so smothered with gold leaf it's almost garish, but this extreme opulence is a powerful reminder of the vast wealth the missions once possessed, and of the dramatic decline Chiquitos has undergone since then. Amidst the beautifully carved altarpieces, confessionals and statues of saints, the most interesting detail is the modern **Via**

Crucis, a depiction of the Easter story that runs around the top of the walls, carved and painted in a bright, naive style similar to that of the original eighteenth-century carvings, but with a distinctly modern theme. Christ is shown living in present-day Chiquitos, surrounded by lush tropical forest inhabited by parrots and tortoises, and his betrayal and death are imbued with contemporary political and ecological metaphor. Christ is flogged by a sombrero-wearing landowner with a machete and revolver in his belt; yellow bulldozers destroy humble homes and hunters carry off wild animals as he suffers under the weight of the cross; police officers and loggers play dice for his robe while others work with chainsaws in the background and timber trucks rumble through a desolate landscape; the forest burns behind him as he's nailed to the cross.

The workshops and Museo Misional

Concepción is the centre for efforts to reconstruct the Jesuit mission churches of Chiquitos (which may explain why restoration work on the church here has gone so over the top), and the main **workshops** for woodcarving and painting are behind the church a block east of the plaza; the staff here are usually happy to show visitors around at 10.30am and 3.30pm each day.

On the south side of the plaza, an old colonial house that was the childhood home of the former military dictator and later elected president Hugo Banzer now houses the **Museo Misional** (Mon–Fri 7.30am–noon & 1.30–5.30pm, Sat & Sun 8am–noon & 2–5.45pm; $0.80), dedicated to the restoration of the mission churches of Chiquitos. On display are some good pictures of the

The Chiquitos musical renaissance

Of all the European arts and crafts introduced to Chiquitos by the Jesuits in the eighteenth century, the one that gained most rapid acceptance amongst the indigenous tribes was music. Organs, trumpets, violins and other instruments imported by the fathers were enthusiastically adopted by the Chiquitanos, who quickly learned to manufacture their own instruments, while the choirs and orchestras of the mission settlements were said by contemporaries to have matched anything in Spanish America at the time. Father Martin Schmidt, the Swiss Jesuit who designed the churches of San Javier, San Raphael and Concepción, was a keen composer who taught music and brought the first church organs to the region, while the missions also benefited from the presence of an Italian named Domenico Zipoli, who had been a well-known composer in Rome before coming to South America.

Like all the cultural accomplishments of the missions, their musical tradition all but disappeared in the centuries following the expulsion of the Jesuits, though its influence remained in the folk music of the Chiquitanos themselves. When the restoration of the mission churches began in the 1970s, however, researchers in Concepción discovered a substantial archive of liturgical and orchestral Renaissance Baroque musical scores, including works by Schmidt and other Jesuit composers. The rediscovery of this lost music inspired a musical revival in Chiquitos, and throughout the mission towns and outlying settlements you'll come across children and young adults playing violins and other instruments with the same skill for which their ancestors were famous in the mission era.

In 1996 this revival inspired a group of music lovers to organize the first **Chiquitos Missions Music Festival**, featuring performances of the music recovered from the lost archives. Since then, the festival has grown into a major biennial event, attracting dozens of orchestras and musical groups from around the world, and involving performances in all the mission towns of Chiquitos as well as in Santa Cruz. For information on future festivals, check out the festival's website at Ⓦwww.festivalesapac.com.

different churches before, during and after reconstruction; examples of the crumbling original wooden pillars and statues which were replaced; and a small workshop where a local craftsman demonstrates the laborious task of restoring the original statues. There are also photographs of letters written and musical scores composed by Father Martin Schmidt which were discovered in the 1970s, and an irreverent totem pole-like statue of Hans Roth, the architect who led the reconstruction effort for 27 years until his death in 1999. The museum shop sells beautiful miniature carved wooden angels and other souvenirs made by local craftsmen involved in the restoration work, as well as CDs of Baroque music written by Martin Schmidt and others which was played in the missions; there are several other handicrafts shops selling similar stuff around the plaza.

Practicalities

Buses from most companies arrive a block north of the plaza, and those from Flota Jenecheru two blocks south of the plaza. Buses from San Ignacio de Velasco often arrive in the early hours of the morning – if you are coming from there, consider booking a room in advance. For a small town, Concepción offers a reasonable range of **accommodation**: the cheapest places are the very basic *Posada El Viajero* (☎03/9643083; ①) and *Alojamiento Tarija* (☎03/9643070; ①), both opposite the Linea 131 del Este office a block north of the plaza; much better and only slightly more expensive is the friendly and pleasant *Hotel Colonial* (☎03/9643050; ②), half a block north of the plaza on Calle Subteniente Roca Lado, which offers clean modern rooms with private bath and hammocks strung outside in the shade. The *Apart Hotel Las Misiones* (☎03/9643021; ④), just off the plaza to the north on Calle Lucas Caballero, offers a considerable step up in price and comfort, with well-furnished rooms with cool tiled floors around a flower-filled garden and a good breakfast included. At the top of the range is the incongruously luxurious *Gran Hotel Concepción* (☎03/9643031 or 9643033, Ⓕ03/9643032; ⑤), on the west side of the plaza, popular with visiting dignitaries and tour groups, which has immaculate rooms around a beautiful courtyard garden with a swimming pool, hammocks, sun lounges and an outdoor restaurant.

By far the best **place to eat** is *Buen Gusto*, on the north side of the plaza, which offers delicious beef and chicken main courses (about $2) and hearty set *almuerzos* ($1.50) in a shaded, plant-filled courtyard; you can also get decent *almuerzos* and steak at the *Club Social Ñuflo de Chavez* on the west side of the plaza. *Alpina*, on the southwest corner, serves cold drinks, snacks and ice cream, while the *Posada El Viajero*, opposite the Trans 131 del Este office a block north of the plaza, is good for early-morning coffee and *empanadas*.

Moving on from Concepción

Moving on from Concepción, **buses** to Santa Cruz depart three times daily (at 7.30am, 2pm and 5pm) from the Linea 131 del Este office a block north of the plaza. To reach San Ignacio de Velasco, you'll need to catch a through bus from Santa Cruz, which passes through in the middle of the night. Of the bus companies that serve this route, two have offices in town where you can buy a ticket in advance and be picked up sometime after midnight: these are Flota Misiones del Oriente, on the north side of the plaza; and Flota Jenecherú, two blocks south of the plaza on Calle Lucas Caballero. To head further north, you can catch a bus from here to San Javier where buses pass to San Ramón ($0.70), where you can then change for a bus heading to San Pablo and then Trinidad. Try to avoid arriving in San Ramón at night where it is rumoured that a number of muggings and scams have taken place.

Ascensión de Gurayos

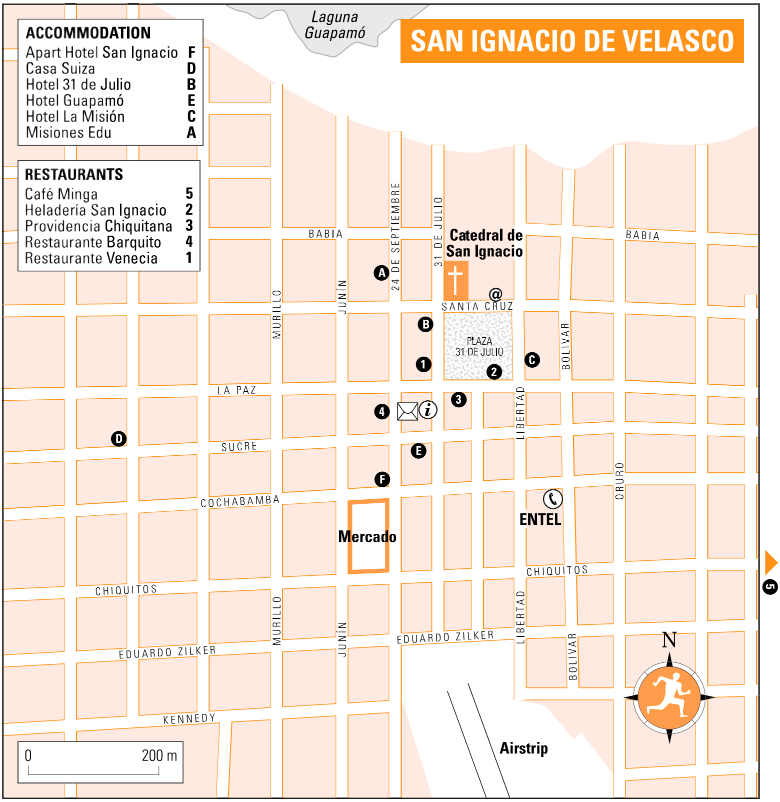
About 300km north of Santa Cruz on the road that leads to Trinidad (capital of the department of Beni), **ASCENSION DE GURAYOS** consists of little more than one bustling street of markets and small stores, but its buzzing feel makes it a good stopover if you're heading towards Trinidad and want to break your journey. Unlike many neighbouring tribes, the music and traditions of the Gurayos people have survived with very little influence, unlike the cultural synthesis that occurred in neighbouring communities of the Jesuit missions. In fact, perhaps more than anywhere else the Gurayos **resisted** the conversion draw of the missions, despite the valiant efforts of the parish priest of San Ramón, Don Gregorio Salvatierra – who came to Ascensión in 1791 and spent forty years teaching them the Gospel. The colourful church was first built in 1892 but fell into a state of decay and was rebuilt in 1987. Ascensión hit the headlines when on the morning of August 14, 1999 disaster struck: the slash-and-burn technique of surrounding campesino communities caused a massive **fire**, destroying over 700 houses and an estimated 400,000 hectares of agricultural land. International and national aid has helped to rebuild the community, but there is still some way to go.

The church opens its doors at 7pm with an almost comical bustle of bell-ringing and hectic cleaning and tidying by its youth members. As you head towards the main plaza from the bus station there are various cafés and restaurants serving good fried chicken and *milanesa*; try *Restaurant El Oriente* for simple but tasty Chinese fare. There are a number of accommodation options; the safest bet is the soulless but friendly *Hotel Igazú* (☎03/9667066). From the main terminal, Transoriente has five buses a day to Santa Cruz (about $3) and every few hours to San Pablo, where you can change for a bus to Trinidad.

San Ignacio de Velasco and around

SAN IGNACIO DE VELASCO, 178km east of Concepción, was founded in 1748, just nineteen years before the expulsion of the Jesuits from South America, but quickly grew to become one of the largest and most developed of the mission towns. It's now the largest settlement in Chiquitos, a bustling market centre for an extensive frontier hinterland of large cattle ranches and isolated indigenous Chiquitano communities. At its centre lies the broad **Plaza 31 de Julio**, which is graced by numerous massive swollen-bellied Toboroche trees, whose tangled branches blossom into brilliant pink and white during June and July. The **Catedral de San Ignacio** (daily 4–6pm; free) stands on the north side of the plaza. The town's magnificent original church collapsed in 1948 – the attempt to rebuild it in the style of the original is spoiled by the ugly modern concrete bell tower but otherwise well executed, though the painted facade decorated with statues of saints, each accompanied by an animal, is if anything too neat and symmetrical. The **interior** still houses many of the original statues of saints and magnificent carved Baroque altarpieces that graced the old mission church.

The town's wide, unpaved streets fan out from the plaza, covered in red dust that turns to mud in the rain and lined with low houses whose tiled roofs extend over the pavement, supported by wooden beams. A short distance behind the church to the north on the outskirts of town the streets run down to **Laguna Guapamó**, an artificial lake created by the Jesuits to provide water and fish for the mission, where locals like to come swimming and fishing on sultry afternoons. You can swim in the lake but there are piranhas so do so with care.


SAN IGNACIO DE VELASCO
ACCOMMODATION
Apart Hotel San Ignacio F
Casa Suiza D
Hotel 31 de Julio B
Hotel Guapamó E
Hotel La Misión C
Misiones Edu A
RESTAURANTS
Café Minga 5
Heladería San Ignacio 2
Providencia Chiquitana 3
Restaurante Barquito 4
Restaurante Venecia 1
Laguna Guapamó
Catedral de San Ignacio
PLAZA 31 DE JULIO
Mercado
ENTEL
Airstrip
BABIA
SANTA CRUZ
LA PAZ
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Arrival and information

San Ignacio has no bus terminal, so **buses** to and from Santa Cruz, San José and San Matías on the Brazilian border arrive and depart from the offices of the various different bus companies, most of which are located on and around Calle 24 de Septiembre in the market area, a block east and a few blocks south of the central plaza. The most luxurious bus company, Jenecherú (☎03/9622513), is relocating to a site called Barraca Zotaí. There is an **Internet café** with reasonably fast connection just east of the cathedral.

Accommodation

There's a fair range of **accommodation** in San Ignacio, though most of the budget places are fairly insalubrious dives used mainly by people involved in cross-border traffic with Brazil.

Apart Hotel San Ignacio Cochabamba with 24 de Septiembre ☎03/9622157, ⓦwww.aparthotelsanignacio.com. A very smart hotel with a beautifully kept garden and swimming pool. Its spacious, pleasant-looking rooms offer cable TV and a/c. ⑥–⑦

Casa Suiza A block north and six blocks west of the plaza on Sucre ☎03/76306798. Welcoming guesthouse with a homely European feel, and full or half board available, with good home cooking. Dedicated managers Selva and Jorgé also run a *lecheria*, and breakfast includes what must be the best yogurt in Bolivia. The simple but clean rooms come with good beds and shared bath (with excellent showers). There's also a fairly extensive book exchange. ③

Hotel 31 de Julio Plaza 31 de Julio (no phone). Basic accommodation in simple, cell-like rooms with shared bath and no fan – strictly for those on a tight budget. ①

Hotel Guapamó 24 de Septiembre with Sucre ☎03/9622095. Set around a big garden shaded by the sprawling tree that gives the hotel its name, with small, simple rooms varying in price depending on whether you want a shared or private bath, a fan or a/c. ②–④

Hotel La Misión Plaza 31 de Julio ☎03/9622333, ⓦwww.hotel-lamision.com. Incongruously opulent modern hotel built in neo-colonial style, with carved wooden pillars outside and a cool courtyard with a fountain and small swimming pool within. The stylish and comfortable rooms come with a/c, and there's also a good but expensive restaurant. ⑥

Misiones Edu Just along from the church in the direction of the lake ☎03/9622276. Immaculately clean rooms with a tasteful, relaxing garden, this is the best budget option in San Ignacio ①–②

Eating

Though there's a limited choice when it comes to **places to eat** in San Ignacio, what's on offer makes up for the small selection.

Café Biológico MINGA Av Las Americas with Chiquitos. A nice spot to drink and watch the processing of coffee and other produce grown in the surrounding communities.

Heladería San Ignacio Just along from *Restaurante Venecia*. Small shop selling an ambitious array of ice-cream desserts, most of which they don't have the ingredients for. That said, ice cream of any kind is welcome in the intense summer heat.

Providencia Chiquitania On the southwest corner of the plaza. Serves good coffee and fresh fruit juices; snacks like burgers, *empanadas* and *sonso* (fried balls of cheese and manioc flour), as well as main courses like steak and *milanesa*.

Restaurante Barquito A block west of the plaza on Calle 24 de Septiembre. Offers a tasty and plentiful Brazilian-style buffet including barbecued beef for about $2 a head. Cheaper meals, snacks and juices can be found at a series of food stalls in the market area along Calle 24 de Septiembre.

Restaurante Venecia On the southwest side of the plaza. Ideally located for looking out onto the attractive plaza, *Venecia* serves filling set *almuerzos* and main courses like steak and chicken for $3–4.

San Juancito

The mission circuit, particularly by public transport, can become a little monotonous. For those tired of unsociably timed buses and lusting for a bit of an adventure, the community tourism project at **San Juancito** (ⓦwww.zorpia.com/sanjuancito) would be the perfect fix. Situated about 20km from San Ignacio, the 40-family-strong community is rustic (no running water or electricity) but provides a fascinating window to life in rural Santa Cruz and Chiquitana culture. You can learn traditional *artesania*, see coffee growing and, if you have the stamina, even help out in the fields. There are also possibilities for horse riding, hiking and night fishing. The basic rooms (about $3 per person) are comfortable and prices include three meals of wholesome home-cooking. Take one of the Santa Cruz buses and ask to be dropped off at San Juancito (about twenty minutes along the road), or go by taxi (about $4) or moto (about $0.60).

South of San Ignacio de Velasco

South of San Ignacio, the three former Jesuit mission towns of **San Miguel**, **Santa Ana** and **San Rafael** all have beautiful eighteenth-century mission churches and – if you hire a taxi – can be visited together in a one-day trip. San Miguel is about 40km south of San Ignacio on the main road to San José de Chiquitos, and San Rafael is another 35km or so further southeast on the same road. From San Rafael another road runs back to San Ignacio via Santa Ana, 20km away, so the three churches can be visited in a loop of about 145km.

Moving on from San Ignacio

Buses to **Santa Cruz** travel mostly by night, departing in the evening from one of the half a dozen or so bus company offices on Calle 24 de Septiembre and around the market area; if you're heading to **Concepción** or **San Javier** you need to get on one of these. Several buses leave every day to **San Matías** on the Brazilian border, from where you can enter **Brazil** and continue to the city of Cáceres in the northern Pantanal. To **San José de Chiquitos**, Trans Carreton on Calle 24 de Septiembre have buses on Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday at 8am, while Trans Universal have buses on Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday at 2pm. From the market, several micros go daily to **San Miguel**, but visiting the other mission towns south of San Ignacio by public transport is more difficult. Trans Bolivia, on Calle 24 de Septiembre, have one micro a day to **San Rafael** via **Santa Ana**, but this leaves at 4pm and returns the next morning, so going there on a day-trip this way is impossible.

If you're heading to the **Parque Nacional Noel Kempff Mercado**, the tourist office in San Ignacio can provide information on the best means of visiting the park, given its remoteness. To reach the park by public transport, your only option is to take the once-weekly bus run by Trans Carreton which heads to La Florida on Friday, returning on Sunday.

The military airline TAM has one **flight** a week between Santa Cruz and San Ignacio (currently on Wed) – to buy a ticket ask around at the airstrip, which is just south of town about five blocks away from the main plaza.

A taxi should cost $20–30; you can find them on the main plaza, and most drivers are happy to do this trip. San Miguel can easily be visited in a half day using one of the **micros** which depart from around the market area (every 1–2hr; 45min). Visiting Santa Ana and San Rafael by public transport involves an overnight stay in San Rafael: you'll need to take the once-daily micro to San Rafael that leaves in the afternoon from the market area in San Ignacio (stopping in Santa Ana long enough for a look at the church), and return the next morning.

San Miguel

Set amid scrubby forest broken by patches of cattle pasture, **SAN MIGUEL** is a sleepy collection of whitewashed houses, many of them built using a traditional technique known as *tabique*, by which walls are made of a framework of durable forest vines plastered with mud. These humble structures make the first sight of the splendid **Iglesia de San Miguel** even more astounding: set on a small rise overlooking the grassy central plaza and dominating the town, the church has been immaculately restored and is perhaps the most beautiful of all the Chiquitos mission churches. Founded in 1721 and built in the same barn-like style as most of the others (though not designed by Martin Schmidt), the church facade is beautifully painted with Baroque floral designs in muted shades of natural ochre, yellow and white, with pictures of St Peter and St Paul on either side of the main door.

To get inside, you'll need to enter the walled **cloister** to the right – part of the original mission compound or Jesuit college which is now used by the parish priest: go under the freestanding white adobe bell tower and ask in the parish offices for someone to let you in – there are no fixed opening hours and no entrance fee, but you are likely to have to ask around for someone with a key. At the time of writing the Eastern European key holders seem rather reluctant to open the church for tourists. Inside, the soaring roof is supported by massive tree trunks carved in spirals, while the walls are lined with metre-high wooden statues of angels, all carved and painted by local craftsmen during the restoration under the direction of foreign specialists – much as the originals would have been. The walls are painted with simple patterns, but the main altarpiece is smothered in gold leaf and beautifully carved with intertwined flowers and vines, with alcoves filled by statues of angels and saints including (in the centre) the Archangel Michael, in a golden helmet and shield, holding a three-pronged sword aloft as he tramples the devil underfoot.

Other than the church, there's nothing much to see in San Miguel. You can get basic **meals** and a Spartan **room** (①) for the night at the *Restaurante La Pascana* on the opposite side of the plaza, which is also where you'll find **micros** heading back to San Ignacio (every 1–2hr; 45min); through buses from San Ignacio to San José also stop here to pick up passengers.

San Rafael

The second Jesuit mission in Chiquitos when it was founded in 1696, the town of **SAN RAFAEL** boasts the biggest of all the region's Jesuit churches, the **Iglesia de San Rafael**, a cavernous, barn-like structure with a free-standing bell tower supported by four spiralled wooden pillars, built under the direction of Martin Schmidt between 1747 and 1749. The magnificent interior features beautiful frescoes of angels playing trumpets, violins and other musical instruments, and some beautifully carved statues of saints in the alcoves of the golden altarpiece, including the central figure of San Rafael, depicted here with a fish in one hand – the Chiquitanos are said to associate the saint with a pre-Christian forest spirit considered the keeper of fish and the patron of those who collect wild honey.

By the time of the Jesuits' expulsion in 1767, San Rafael was home to over seven thousand people, but its population is now only about a thousand, and the gilded opulence of the church contrasts sharply with the poverty and decline of the town, whose failing economy is now based on cattle ranching and logging, though the once-rich surrounding forests are now reduced to scrub and secondary growth. There are a couple of basic **restaurants** in town – try *El Choleao*, half a block south of the plaza, for a good set *almuerzo*. You can find a simple **alojamiento** (①) at the basic *Hotel Lorena*, where you can find a room for the night. The one **micro** a day to San Ignacio leaves from the plaza in the morning, returning in the afternoon; you can also flag down the once-daily through bus from San Ignacio to San José.

Santa Ana

About 20km north of San Rafael on a different road back to San Ignacio, the small village of **SANTA ANA** is home to perhaps the least architecturally imposing of the six mission churches of Chiquitos. Occupying one side of a large grassy plaza where donkeys graze and schoolchildren play football, the **Iglesia de Santa Ana** has not yet been fully restored and as such retains an intimate, rustic charm more in keeping with the sleepy atmosphere of its surroundings than the grandiose edifices of San Rafael or Concepción. If the church is locked, ask around for Luís Rocha Beña who has looked after the key for over 40 years and knows many a tale about the church's history. Occasionally you might find the church overrun with bats, and the efforts to smoke the bats out only make the atmosphere all the more reminiscent of a horror movie. There's some speculation as to whether this is the original Jesuit church at all – built entirely of wood, it has none of the usual IHS signs and may have been rebuilt shortly after the order was expelled in 1767. Inside, there are some beautiful but decaying wooden statues, and local children often use the interior to practise the violins and other musical instruments which were introduced with so much success by the original missionaries and are now enjoying a resurgence in popularity. Ask to be taken to see the beautifully restored organ, thought to have been constructed in 1754. It is reached by going up the winding stairwell to the right of the main entrance and they might even let you have a play. There's a small **museum** on the corner to the left of the church where there are some fascinating Chiquitania artefacts, including some huge pots for brewing *chicha*. At the back of the museum there are also a few simple rooms for about $5 a night.

San José de Chiquitos

About 130km south of San Rafael, the dusty town of **SAN JOSÉ DE CHIQUITOS** is home to the westernmost of the six mission churches, and also stands on the railway line that runs east from Santa Cruz to Puerto Suarez, Quijarro and the Brazilian border. Despite this (for Chiquitos) abundance of transport connections, like the other mission towns San José has the torpid feel of a place that has been in gradual decline for two and a half centuries – it's now nothing more than a dreary frontier market town and supply centre for the cattle ranches and Mennonite colonies of the surrounding hinterland.

The mission of San José was founded in 1696, close to the original site of the city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, which had been abandoned over a century before. The **mission complex** (7am–7pm; free) was built in the last decades

▲ Music lessons at the mission of San José before the Jesuits' expulsion from the Americas in 1767. Occupying one side of the town's grassy central plaza, it's utterly distinct from the other churches of Chiquitos, being closer in design to those of the Paraguayan missions, with an elegant Baroque facade built entirely of stone. The complex consists of four buildings linked by a three-metre-high wall that forms a defensive compound. From right to left, these four buildings are the Casa de los Muertos (chapel of the dead), where bodies where once stored before being buried; the church itself; the four-tiered stone bell tower that would also have served as a lookout post; and the Jesuit college, a long hall with the date 1750 and the IHS insignia inscribed above the doorway. That these elegant structures have survived in the midst of the wilderness for two and a half centuries is all the more impressive given the fact that they were built by indigenous masons with no previous experience of stonework (they may never have seen a stone building before) in a region where stone itself was hard to come by – even the original Spanish settlement of Santa Cruz La Vieja had been built of wood and adobe. Behind this facade, however, the main body of the church is built of wood, with a roof supported by tree-trunk pillars: this may have been completed by the Chiquitanos after the Jesuits had departed, perhaps in the hope that if the fathers could no longer protect them, God would. The interior itself is in a poor state of repair but is currently undergoing restoration, and there are beautiful but dilapidated religious statues and other ornaments lying around awaiting repair.

Other than the church there's nothing to see in San José, though if you've got an afternoon to kill while waiting for a train you could walk down to the site of **Santa Cruz La Vieja**, the original site of the city of Santa Cruz, founded by Nuflo de Chavez in 1561 but abandoned in 1594 in the face of persistent indigenous attack and moved to its current site 260km to the west. From the plaza, turn right as you face the church and head south out of town for about 4km and you'll reach a sign to the Parque Nacional Hístorico Santa Cruz La Vieja, a grandiose title for what is in fact simply a series of overgrown mounds set amid dense scrub and giant cactus trees, all that remains of the Spanish settlement.

Practicalities

Buses along the bumpy – but passable, even in rainy season – road to San Ignacio arrive and depart from the offices of the two bus companies that serve the route: Trans Carreton, a block east of the plaza; and Trans Universal, four blocks north of the plaza beyond the gasoline station on the road out of town. The once-daily buses to San Ignacio leave early and it's best to book the day before. The **train station** is two blocks north and four blocks east of the plaza. Trains in both directions pass through late at night, and it's worth buying tickets in advance, especially if you're travelling west to Santa Cruz, though this can involve a long time queuing – it's best to turn up before 8am on the morning of the day you want to travel. There are two basic **places to stay**: the clean and comfortable *Hotel Turobo* on the west side of the plaza opposite the church (☎03/9372037; ②–③) is the best bet and offers a choice between simple rooms with fans or more expensive rooms with private bath and air-conditioning; the *Hotel San Silvestre* (☎03/9372141; ②), opposite the station, is less attractive, but convenient if you're leaving or arriving on a late-night train.

There are a few basic **restaurants** serving simple *almuerzos* and fried chicken on and around the plaza. The best choice is *Restaurant Cubanito*, adjacent to *Hotel Turobo*, where wholesome Bolivian fare is served in a simple but pleasant dining room. There are a few shops serving coffee and *empanadas* on the street that runs north along its east side; and plenty of food stalls along the railway line. The most popular restaurants are out beyond the railway line on the road north

The Mennonites

San José's most unlikely sight is the bizarre spectacle of tall white people with flaxen hair and ruddy cheeks – the men dressed in denim dungarees and straw hats, the women in full-length dresses and headscarves – walking around town or driving horse-drawn buggies. These are the **Mennonites**, members of a radical Protestant sect founded in the Netherlands by Menno Simmons in the sixteenth century. For the next four centuries the Mennonites found themselves driven from country to country as they attempted to escape religious persecution and conscription, and to find land on which to pursue their dreams of an agrarian utopia. After migrating to Germany, they moved in succession to Russia, the US and Canada, Mexico and Belize, until finally arriving in Bolivia and neighbouring Paraguay in the twentieth century, attracted by the availability of cheap land, guarantees of religious freedom, and exemption from military service. Perhaps 20,000 Mennonites now live in communities across the Eastern Lowlands, successfully farming maize, soya and sorghum, and raising cattle in self-contained agricultural communities.

The central tenets of the Mennonites are the refusal to take oaths or bear arms (they are exempt from military service in Bolivia); the baptism only of believers; simplicity of dress and personal habits; and an unwillingness to marry outside the faith. They also to varying degrees reject most modern technology, including cars and computers, though faced with the difficult agricultural conditions of Chiquitos, many Bolivian Mennonites allow the use of tractors – though not, bizarrely, of rubber tyres, so their wheels are covered with steel spikes. Though some speak Spanish, and a few of the older ones who grew up in North America also have some English, amongst themselves they speak Plattdeutsch, an archaic German dialect. If you can bridge the language barrier, many Mennonite men are happy to talk about their unusual lives, and are often just as curious about your own lifestyle, which to them is equally bizarre. However, there seems to be some level of distrust between the Mennonites and the locals, possibly based on the Mennonite buying up of land in the area. The irony is that, two and a half centuries after the Jesuits were expelled, religiously inspired utopian dreams are still being pursued in the plains of Chiquitos, albeit by white Protestants instead of indigenous Catholics. This isn't, however, an irony that would have been appreciated by the Jesuits themselves – their order was set up precisely to combat Protestant sects like the Mennonites, whom they would have regarded as dangerous heretics.

to San Ignacio and serve filling and inexpensive set *almuerzos* and steaks. The **ENTEL** telephone office is half a block east of the plaza on the south side of the church complex.

Parque Nacional Noel Kempff Mercado

Occupying 16,000 square kilometres of Bolivia's far northeast, on the border with Brazil, **PARQUE NACIONAL NOEL KEMPFF MERCADO** is the most isolated, pristine and spectacular national park in the country, and one of the most remote wilderness regions in all South America. Encompassing a range of different ecosystems including different types of Amazon rainforest, dry and seasonally inundated savannah, and scrubby Brazilian *cerrado*, the park supports an astonishing range and abundance of wildlife, including over 630 species of birds (among them twenty different types of parrot and seven of macaw), as well as multicoloured tanagers and toucans, and such rarities as the mighty harpy eagle. In addition, eleven species of monkey inhabit the park, and all the major

▲ Arco Iris waterfall, Parque Nacional Noel Kempff Mercado

Amazonian mammals – including jaguar, tapir, peccary, deer, giant anteater and armadillo – roam its forests and savannahs, while its rivers and lakes are home to abundant pink freshwater dolphins and the highly endangered giant river otter. Of course, most of these species are also present in many of Bolivia's other national parks; the difference is that Noel Kempff Mercado is so comparatively undisturbed by human activity that your chances of actually seeing all these different animals are much higher here than anywhere else in the country.

The park's most remarkable natural feature is the **Huanchaca plateau** (also known as the Caparú Plateau), a vast sandstone *meseta* which rises 500m above the surrounding rainforest to an elevated plain of grasslands and dry *cerrado* woodlands, from where spectacular waterfalls plunge down the sheer escarpment into the park's rivers. This isolated plateau covers over seven thousand square kilometres, or a bit under half the park, and provided the inspiration for Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's novel *The Lost World* – at least according to Colonel Percy Harrison Faucett, the legendary British explorer who was the first European to see the plateau when he came here in 1910 while demarcating Bolivia's borders, and who later described the landscape to Conan Doyle in London. The park was first established in 1979 as the Parque Nacional Huanchaca, but was renamed in 1988 (when it was also expanded) in honour of the pioneering Bolivian biologist and conservationist Noel Kempff Mercado, who was murdered here by drug traffickers after stumbling across a secret cocaine laboratory high on the Huanchaca plateau.

The park was expanded again in 1997 under a pioneering "carbon credit" scheme, whereby two US energy corporations and the oil giant BP paid around $10 million to buy out loggers operating in an adjacent forest area of 6340 square kilometres, which was then added to the park – this allows the corporations to claim credits for the carbon dioxide which the rescued trees will absorb towards their targets for reducing emissions under the international Kyoto treaty – which expires in 2012 – on global warming. As yet, this is the biggest such carbon-credit project in the world, but the fact that the US government continues to show rather lukewarm support for the treaty and discussion of what will replace it, means that its future remains uncertain. For more recent developments on the project, go to Ⓦwww.nature.org.

Visiting the park

The park's remote location inevitably means that it's expensive and difficult to visit. The southern border of the park is over 200km from the nearest town, San Ignacio de Velasco in Chiquitos, which is itself another 400km by road from Santa Cruz. The park was named a UNESCO Natural Heritage Site in 2002 and is currently administered by SERNAP, though there are plans for the community of Central Indigena Bajo Paragua to take charge of the park.

If you want to visit the park independently you must inform SERNAP (Ⓣ02/2317742, Ⓔinfor@sernap.gov.bo) first for information and permission to enter, which costs $30, irrespective of how long you stay. SERNAP maintain two "camps" (*campamentos*) with accommodation for visitors in the park: **Los Fierros**, towards the southern end, which can be reached by light aircraft or overland along a rough logging trail that runs along the park's western boundary from San Ignacio; and the more luxurious **Flor de Oro**, on the banks of the Río Iteñez (which marks the park's northern boundary and the Bolivian border with Brazil), which can be reached either by light aircraft or by a circuitous overland route via Brazil. The simple but comfortable cabins have private bathrooms and there is a large communal dining area and interpretation room. Both camps are close to pretty much the full range of the park's different ecosystems, with ample opportunities to see wildlife, and both also offer the chance to climb up onto the Huanchaca plateau. Los Fierros is considered the best place for spotting large mammals, particularly jaguars, while Flor de Oro is close to the park's two most spectacular waterfalls, though these can only be visited during the rainy season (Nov–May).

Only a few hundred people visit the park each year, and almost all of those arrive by chartered light aircraft from Santa Cruz, a spectacular flight across hundreds of kilometres of virtually uninhabited rainforest, which can be arranged either by a handful of tour agencies in Santa Cruz (see p.307). A return flight to Flor de Oro costs several hundred dollars per person depending on the size of the plane, whether or not all the seats are full, and how long you spend at the park; flights to Los Fierros cost slightly less. A typical five-day all-inclusive package with a Santa Cruz-based tour agency visiting both camps by plane should cost about $1000 – a high price for Bolivia, but one which few visitors regret paying. Those travellers who have attempted the trip on a very strict budget often turn back as arriving by public transport is arduous and entering the park without a guide can be dangerous.

Los Fierros

Los Fierros lies at the southern end of the park, within easy hiking distance of the Huanchaca plateau, and with many trails leading through the surrounding rainforest and savannahs with excellent wildlife-spotting possibilities – jaguars are regularly spotted here, and other mammals like monkeys are abundant, as is a kaleidoscopic variety of birds. The park guards based here are usually happy to act as guides. The most popular excursion is to **El Encanto**, a narrow but spectacular waterfall that plunges 80m off the sheer sides of the plateau. The waterfall is a one-day walk from the camp along a fairly clear track, and there's a basic shelter close by where you can camp out if you have you own equipment, but otherwise you're better off hiring the park guards' pick-up truck to take you there and back in a day. Other day hikes lead up onto the plateau via the "Subida de los Españoles" and to the Laguna Chaplín, which is home to abundant aquatic bird life.

Accommodation in Los Fierros is in rustic dormitories (each sleeping up to fourteen people) with foam mattresses and shared bathrooms; the cost is about $25 per person per night with simple meals included, less if you prepare your own food using the basic cooking facilities available. You can also camp out here if you have your own equipment. To reach Los Fierros overland you can either hire a **pick-up truck** in San Ignacio ($250–300 round trip), which the tourist office can help organize, or catch the once-weekly bus to **La Florida**, which lies on the western margin of the park some 200km north of San Ignacio. The bus leaves on Friday and returns on Sunday and takes twelve to fourteen hours in good conditions, so going this way you'll end up spending over a week in the park. There are some basic, screened-in huts at La Florida where you could stop for a few nights. Once in La Florida, it's still another 35km to Los Fierros along a track through the rainforest; if you're arriving by bus you can arrange for the rangers at Los Fierros to pick you up and take you back again at a cost of $120, including an excursion to the El Encanto waterfall.

Flor de Oro

Based in a former ranch which once belonged to one of the suspected drug traffickers implicated in the murder of Noel Kempff Mercado, **Flor de Oro** enjoys a beautiful setting on the banks of a broad sweep of the Río Iteñez, which marks the border with Brazil. Numerous trails lead through the surrounding wildlife-rich rainforest and semi-inundated termite savannahs around the camp, and the park guards based here act as guides. You can also take boat trips out on the river and into the tranquil lakes along its length, which are excellent places for spotting pink freshwater dolphins, playful giant river otters and all manner of waterbirds. The real attraction of Flor de Oro, though, is the opportunity to visit the Ahlfeld and Arco Iris **waterfalls**, which tumble down the steep escarpment of the Huanchaca plateau. If you arrived by plane, you'll already have seen these falls from the air; reaching them on the ground involves a four-hour motorboat trip with one of the park guards down the Río Iteñez and up the smaller Río Paucana to the smaller and more rustic **Campamento Ahlfeld**, a trip which is only possible when rivers are high enough in the rainy season, roughly between November and May. The **Ahlfeld** waterfall, twenty minutes' walk from the camp, is a stunning multiple waterfall 40m high and twice as wide, terminating in a deep pool of cool emerald water which is excellent for swimming. You can also climb to the top of the falls, from where the view is equally dramatic.

It's a lengthy hike (4–5hr return) to the **Arco Iris** waterfall from Campamento Ahlfeld, including a steep climb up the escarpment onto the top of the Huanchaca plateau, but well worth the effort. The vegetation on the top of the plateau is very different from the rainforest below, consisting of dry and thorny scrub and low forest known by the Brazilian word *cerrado*. Utterly unaltered by human action and surrounded by a seemingly endless sea of rainforest below, it's easy to see why this landscape inspired Arthur Conan Doyle's fantasy of a Lost World inhabited by strange prehistoric beasts. Viewed from above, the Arco Iris waterfall is an overwhelming sight: a vertical cascade plunging 100m down through virgin rainforest and throwing up great clouds of spray, which refract the sunlight, creating the innumerable rainbows that give the falls their name.

Practicalities

Almost everyone who comes to Flor de Oro does so by **plane** from Santa Cruz, but you can also get here **overland via Brazil**. To do this you'll need to cross the border at San Matías, a day's bus journey east of San Ignacio, then work your way north using the fairly regular buses which run via Cáceres and Vilhena to the town of Pimenteiras, on the north bank of the Río Iteñez (which the Brazilians call Guaporé River), from where you can hire a boat to make the thirty-minute journey downstream to Flor de Oro. This journey takes two to three days, and you should inform FAN of your plans and book accommodation in Flor de Oro before you set off.

Accommodation in Flor de Oro costs around $65 per person per day, with all meals included. Visitors sleep in spacious, fully furnished and immaculately clean private rooms with solar-powered lights and fans, plus private bathrooms, with hammocks strung up in a mosquito-screened patio overlooking the river outside. The meals are very good, with a distinctly Brazilian flavour, and are served in a fully screened dining room.

East from Santa Cruz to the Brazilian border

From Santa Cruz, the railway line runs some 680km east to the Brazilian border across a seemingly endless expanse of forest and tangled scrub, gradually giving way to the vast swamplands of the **Pantanal** as the border draws near – it's known as the Train of Death, not because of any danger, but because the interminably slow journey across the hot, monotonous plain can become so boring. Travellers today should think themselves lucky, however: until well into the twentieth century the trip across this vast wilderness took up to a month by ox-cart, while the possibility of attack by nomadic tribes remained a genuine possibility. The dream of a railway line across Chiquitos to the Río Paraguay and Brazil was a Bolivian national aspiration for over a century, and when the line was completed in the late 1950s it provided a huge boost for the economic development of Santa Cruz and the Eastern Lowlands. Even so, human settlements along the line remain few and far between. After San José de Chiquitos, roughly halfway along, there are no major towns until you reach the border, and such settlements as there are – Roboré, Aguas Calientes, Candelaria, El Carmen – are forlorn villages or military outposts where the arrival of the train is the most exciting event of the day. The region's main towns are both close to the Brazilian border: **Puerto Suárez**, a half-forgotten lakeside outpost that was once the focus of Bolivian dreams of access to the Atlantic via the Río Paraguay, but which has now been commercially overshadowed by the dismal border trading settlement of **Quijarro**, the train's last stop before the frontier. At the time of writing a paved road was in the process of being built between Santa Cruz and Puerto Suárez. It seems certain that the road will open up this largely unvisited area to more tourists and trade.

El Chochis

Between San José and Roboré, an immense mass of red rock marks the community of **EL CHOCHIS**, about 360km east of Santa Cruz. At the foot of this spectacular rock tower is the **Santuario de Chochis** – a beautifully quaint church with simple stained glass and an array of intricate wood carvings.

The Pantanal

Much of Bolivia's far east along the border with Brazil is covered by the **Pantanal**, the vast flood plain on either side of the Río Paraguay that forms the biggest freshwater wetland system in the world. Stretching over 200,000 square kilometres, this immense inland river delta is a mosaic of different ecosystems, including swamp, lakes, seasonally flooded grasslands and different kinds of forest, most of which is turned into an immense inland freshwater sea when the waters of the Río Paraguay rise in the rainy season between November and March. This largely pristine wilderness supports possibly the densest concentration of wildlife in the Americas, including an astonishing variety of birds, reptiles like anacondas and caimans, and large mammals including swamp deer, giant otter, jaguar, capybara and tapir, all of which can be seen with greater frequency here than anywhere in the Amazon.

About eighty percent of the Pantanal lies in Brazil, but the fifteen or so percent that lies within Bolivia's borders (the rest is in Paraguay) is arguably more pristine, largely because the Bolivian side of the border is virtually uninhabited. The Bolivian side is also better protected, on paper at least – north and south of Puerto Suárez, huge areas of the Pantanal are covered by the **Area Natural San Matías** and the **Parque Nacional Otuquis**, which together cover almost 40,000 square kilometres. However, the isolation and lack of development that have allowed the Bolivian Pantanal to survive in largely pristine condition also mean that it's very difficult to visit. Almost no organized ecotourism facilities exist on the Bolivian side, and (particularly since the devaluation of the Brazilian currency against the dollar in the late 1990s) it's cheaper and much easier to organize an expedition into the Pantanal from Corumbá in Brazil. Other than hiring a fisherman in Puerto Suárez to take you out across Lago Cáceres, the only real ecotourism operator on the Bolivian side is El Tumbador (☎01628699), situated on a turn-off from the main road midway between Puerto Suárez and Arroyo Concepción, who can arrange half- and one-day excursions into the Pantanal, though at a higher price than operators on the Brazilian side. Most Santa Cruz tour operators now offer some kind of Pantanal package; try Ruta Verde in Santa Cruz, who use the smart *El Hotel Pantanal Resort*, or Michael Bledinger in Samaipata.

The church was first established by the survivors of a disaster that rocked the area in 1979. After twenty days of torrential rain, on January 15, 1979 a volcanic eruption caused the railway bridge to collapse, killing many passengers of a passing train. Don César, a monk and sculptor, is an excellent guide who can be contacted through PROBIOMA (see box, p.320) and who has contributed to much of the carvings and artwork. It is well worth the climb to take the path that goes some way up the Cerro, as the views stretch across the strange moon-like landscape. The best way of letting the community know that you want to stay is by contacting 🏃 PROBIOMA (Ⓔecoturismo@probioma.org.bo in Santa Cruz; see p.320). Camping (a series of cabins is currently being built), excellent home cooking and a local guide will cost $30 per day. Remember to tell the conductor that you want to stop.

Puerto Suárez

Just before reaching the Brazilian border at Quijarro, the railway line passes through the much older and more agreeable town of **PUERTO SUÁREZ**, situated on the shores of Lago Cáceres, a large freshwater lake linked to the waters of the mighty Río Paraguay. Founded in 1875, Puerto Suárez has long been the focus of Bolivian ambitions to gain access to the Atlantic Ocean via the Ríos Paraguay and Paraná, but the lake has always been too shallow and choked with weeds to take anything but small, shallow-bottomed boats. In the

1980s Bolivia, together with Brazil, Paraguay and Argentina, began discussing proposals for the construction of a Paraguay-to-Paraná "**Hidrovia**", or waterway, which would have involved straightening and deepening the channel of the upper Río Paraguay to make it navigable to large vessels all year round. However, the project's cost, possible environmental consequences, and the fact that the harvest and shipment of soya beans, the region's main export, takes place in June and July when water levels are naturally high enough for large vessels to use the river, led to the project being shelved.

Puerto Suárez once enjoyed a modest flow of tourists and duty-free shoppers from Brazil, and benefited from a considerable cross-border smuggling industry. All this dried up, however, following the devaluation of the Brazilian currency in the late 1990s, and the town has yet to get its act together and tap into the growing number of ecotourists who visit the region to visit the wildlife-rich wetlands of the Pantanal (see box, p.343). This is a shame, as it's a peaceful and dignified place, beautifully set on a bluff overlooking the calm blue waters of the lake, and with the white city of Corumbá in Brazil visible in the distance. Plans are underway to build a tourist pier out over the lake, and if you ask around by the shore it's fairly easy to find a boatman willing to take you out fishing or wildlife spotting, but for a lengthier trip into the Pantanal you're better off going from Corumbá in Brazil, where ecotourism is better organized and less expensive. The road to Santa Cruz is now being paved, so over the next few years this area looks set to open up to more tourists than ever before.

Practicalities

The **train station** is a couple of kilometres from town, a short ride in one of the collective taxis that meet every train. There's no great reason **to stay** unless you're waiting for a train or plane to Santa Cruz; if you do, the best place is the *Hotel Sucre* on the main plaza (Ⓣ03/9762069; ④), which offers small but comfortable air-conditioned rooms around a pleasant courtyard garden, and also has a decent restaurant. A cheaper option is the basic *Hotel Beby* (Ⓣ03/9762700; ②–③), a few blocks northwest of the plaza along Avenida Bolívar, which has simple, box-like rooms with fan or air-conditioning. There are several cheap **restaurants** and snack bars strung out along Avenida Bolívar, but the best place for lunch is the outdoor *El Mirador*, on the bluff overlooking the lake two blocks southeast of the plaza, where you can get big plates of delicious fried river fish or even – if your ecological conscience allows – *jacaré*, the small caimans with which the lake waters teem. If you need a visa, the **Brazilian consulate** (Mon–Fri 8am–2pm) is two blocks southeast of the plaza on the waterfront.

If you're **moving on** from Puerto Suárez to Santa Cruz by train, you'll need to buy a ticket in advance from the station. The airport, from where there are flights three or four times weekly to Santa Cruz, is about 6km away, a $1 taxi ride from the plaza. You can buy airline tickets from the LAB and Aerosur offices on the plaza. To get to Quijarro, you need first to take a collective taxi from the plaza to the border at Arroyo Concepción ($0.80), and catch another one from there.

Quijarro

The last stop on the railway line in Bolivia is **QUIJARRO**, a dismal collection of shacks and dosshouses surrounding the station – if you're heading on to Brazil, you're better off pushing on to the border at Arroyo Concepción. If you end up having to spend the night here, the best budget option is the basic but clean *Residencial Ariane* (Ⓣ03/9782129; ①–②), directly opposite

Moving on from Quijarro

Collective taxis wait outside the station to take passengers to the Brazilian border at **Arroyo Concepción** ($0.50 per person, though they often try to overcharge), a couple of kilometres away, where there are several moneychangers as well as collective taxis on to Puerto Suárez if you want to kill some time while waiting for a train. Alternatively, there is the expensive but highly luxurious *Hotel El Pantanal* (ⓣ03/9782020, ⓦwww.elpantanalhotel.com; ⑥–⑦) with sauna and swimming pool. There are plans to attach a backpacker hostel to this resort, making a budget trip to the Pantanal a real possibility for the future. For the latest information, contact Lauren and Andrés at the *Jodanga Hostel* in Santa Cruz (see p.301). To **cross the border**, get your passport stamped at the Bolivian *migración* office (Mon–Sat 8am–noon & 2.30–6pm, Sun 9am–noon), then walk across into Brazil, where taxis, motorcycle taxis and regular buses wait to take passengers across the bridge over the Río Paraguay and on into the delightful city of Corumbá, where you'll need to get an entry stamp from the Federal police office.

If you're arriving from Brazil, you should go straight to the train station to get a ticket – these go on sale the day before departures or the same morning for evening departures. You may have to queue for some time to get a ticket, and the cheaper ones often sell out quickly, particularly during public holidays, though this is rarely a problem for Pullman and Ferrobus tickets. Trains currently leave at about 1.30pm on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday, and at noon on Saturday, while the faster but more expensive Ferrobus leaves at 6pm on Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

the station; a more upmarket option is the *Hotel Bibosi* (ⓣ03/9782113; ④–⑤), two blocks east of the station, which offers comfortable rooms with TV and air-conditioning, has a swimming pool and can organize rather expensive tours into the Pantanal, though at the moment you're better off doing this from Brazil. The *Bibosi* also has the best restaurant in town, though that's not saying much – otherwise, there's a series of cheap and insalubrious-looking restaurants strung out opposite the station.

The Chaco

South of the Santa Cruz–Quijarro railway line, the tropical dry forest gradually gives way to **the Chaco**, a vast and arid landscape of dense scrub and virtually impenetrable thornbrush which stretches south to the Paraguayan border and far beyond, inhabited only by isolated cattle ranchers and occasional communities of Guaraní and semi-nomadic Ayoreo. The Chaco is one of the last great wildernesses of South America and supports plenty of wildlife, including jaguar, peccary and deer – much of it now protected by the **Parque Nacional Kaa-Iya del Gran Chaco**, the biggest protected area in all South America, which covers over 34,000 square kilometres southeast of Santa Cruz adjacent to the Paraguayan border. However, your chances of seeing any of this wildlife are slim. There are no organized tourist facilities in the Chaco, so unless you have your own 4WD and are prepared to organize a wilderness adventure, your view of the region will be limited to what you can see from the window of a bus or train: a wall of dense, scrubby vegetation broken only occasionally where farms or ranches have been hacked out of the bush.

There are two routes through the Bolivian Chaco, both starting from Santa Cruz. The first and less taxing is the route by road or railway down the region's western edge to the towns of **Villamontes**, the biggest settlement in the Bolivian Chaco, and **Yacuiba** on the Argentine border. The second and more strenuous is along the rough **trans-Chaco road**, which splits off from the road and rail route to Yacuiba at Boyuibe, heading east to the Paraguayan border at Hito Villazón, from where it runs across the heart of this great wilderness to the Paraguayan capital, Asunción, an arduous and adventurous journey (served by daily buses from Santa Cruz) that takes 24 hours in the May-to-September dry season when conditions are good, and much longer after rain, when the road turns to mud.

South from Santa Cruz to Villamontes

From Santa Cruz a rough road and single-track railway run south into the Chaco, following the eastern foothills of the Andes down towards the Argentine border. About 285km south of Santa Cruz the road (but not the railway) passes through **Camiri**, a grim and functional oil-producing town and military garrison from where a rough road (served by daily buses in the dry season) leads up though the highlands to Sucre, 450km away. Camiri has a small range of basic places to stay and eat, but unless you're in the oil industry there's no earthly reason why you should want to come here, never mind spend the night. About 60km south of Camiri the road and railway meet again at **Boyuibe**, a forlorn military outpost at the edge of the Chaco from where a poor side road heads 135km east to **Hito Villazón** and the beginning of the great trans-Chaco road across Paraguay.

From Boyuibe, the main road and railway continue 90km south to **VILLAMONTES**, the main town in the Bolivian Chaco. A hot and dusty but welcoming frontier town with a mostly Guaraní population, Villamontes was the scene of one of Bolivia's few military victories during the disastrous **Chaco War** with Paraguay. In 1935–36 the town was successfully defended against Paraguayan attack, reversing the Paraguayan thrust towards Bolivia's oilfields and leading eventually to a peace agreement. Today, Villamontes remains very much dominated by the Bolivian army, and indeed the military provide the only real tourist sight in town: from the central Plaza 6 de Agosto a diagonal road leads

The Guaraní

The western Bolivian Chaco is home to the **Guaraní** people – known historically as the Chiriguanos – the largest indigenous group in the Bolivian lowlands, with a population of about 75,000. The Guaraní originally migrated across the Chaco from east of the Río Paraguay in search of a mythical "Land Without Evil" (the abode of the gods, believed to lie in the west), occupying the southwestern fringes of the Andes in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries just as the Inca empire was expanding into the same region. Despite this, the Guaraní successfully resisted conquest by the Incas, and subsequently proved amongst the fiercest and most tenacious indigenous opponents of the Spanish. Not until well into the Republican era were they completely subjugated, when the last great Guaraní uprising was brutally crushed in 1892, after which their remaining lands were seized by the Bolivian state and divided into large private ranches defended by army forts. In recent decades, the Guaraní have been struggling to regain control of their ancestral territories using land reform and indigenous rights legislation, and in spite of obstructive bureaucracy have now recovered large areas, where they farm maize, cotton, peanuts and other crops. Despite this, hundreds if not thousands of Guaraní still work on large cattle ranches under conditions of debt servitude which are little different from slavery.

two blocks northeast to Plaza 15 de Abril, where a large white mansion houses the **Museo Historico Militar Heroes del Chaco** (daily 6am–9pm; free), which is full of military paraphernalia from the war with Paraguay, though there's little to suggest that Bolivia lost. The garden of the house is filled with trenches, dugouts and bunkers with machine guns, mortars and artillery pieces, while the walls are painted with maps justifying Bolivia's territorial claims in the Chaco. Inside, there are plenty of photos of the terrible conditions endured by troops on both sides in a war where thirst was as big a killer as the enemy, and in which Bolivia sustained casualties proportionally comparable to those of European countries involved in World War I. One particularly poignant shot shows a priest blessing fresh-faced Andean conscripts about to go over the top: the caption reads: "There go those who will never return."

Practicalities

The centre of Villamontes is the broad **Plaza 6 de Agosto**, from where the town's main street, Avenida Mendez, runs north eight blocks to the small **bus terminal**, where daily buses to and from Tarija and Santa Cruz arrive and depart. The **train station** is another two blocks north on the same street; a taxi from either into town should cost about $0.40. The best place to stay is the popular and good-value *Residencial Raldes* (Ⓣ04/6722088; ②–③), a block east of the plaza, which has clean modern rooms with fan or (more expensively) air-conditioning around a pleasant central courtyard; for those on a tight budget, the friendly *Residencial Miraflores* (Ⓣ04/6722991; ①), on Avenida Mendez midway between the plaza and the bus terminal, offers grubby, basic rooms with shared bath. Inexpensive **meals**, coffee and juices can be found in the covered public market a few blocks north of the plaza on Avenida Mendez; alternatively, the excellent *Restaurant El Arriero*, one of several on the plaza, dishes up exquisite Argentine-style grilled steaks (about $5), as well as good fish and pizza. On the road out of town towards Yacuiba a series of foodstalls serves delicious fried *surubí* fish from the nearby Río Pilcomayo, considered one of the finest fishing rivers in all Bolivia. The **ENTEL** telephone office is just off the plaza to the west.

Moving on from Villamontes, buses and trains **to Santa Cruz** both leave in the evening – they take about the same time but the trains are more comfortable – while buses **to Tarija** from Santa Cruz stop here on their way through in the early hours of the morning and pick up passengers if they have room, though there's no guarantee they will; if you're travelling to Tarija you've a better chance of getting a seat on a bus from Yacuiba. Micros and collective taxis **to Yacuiba** leave every half-hour or so from three blocks north of the plaza on Avenida Mendez.

Yacuiba and the Argentine border

The small and modern border town of **YACUIBA** lies about 90km south of Villamontes by road and rail. Yacuiba sprang up following the construction of the railway and oil pipeline to Argentina in the 1960s, and retains a distinctly Argentine flavour, dominated by restaurants and duty-free shops catering to tourists from across the border. However, following Argentina's protracted economic crisis of the late 1990s – and above all since the devaluation of the Argentine currency in 2002 – this cross-border flow of tourists and shoppers in one direction and smuggled goods in the other has virtually dried up, giving Yacuiba a mournful feel, like a tourist resort that's permanently out of season. As such, there's no reason to linger unless you arrive at night and have to wait for a bus or train out.

The **train station** is two blocks south and a block west of the central plaza, while the **bus terminal**, from where there are morning and evening departures to Tarija and Santa Cruz, lies about 1km south of the plaza. Micros and trufis to and from Villamontes arrive and depart from offices just off the plaza on the road to the bus terminal. There are plenty of **places to stay** in Yacuiba, aimed primarily at Argentine tourists, truck drivers and Bolivian migrants. Budget options are concentrated around the bus terminal – try the *Residencial Urkupiña* (☎04/6822320; ②), which offers basic rooms with fans and a choice of shared or private bath. The more upmarket places are in the streets that run north from the plaza: of these, the best is the stylish *Hotel Paris* (☎04/6822182; ④), on Calle Comercio, which has comfortable modern rooms with air-conditioning and cable TV. There are plenty of good **restaurants** on and around the plaza serving delicious Argentine beef, chicken and pizza – the *Parillada Ricardo* is particularly popular. Also on the plaza are the **ENTEL** telephone office and Cybernet café, which has **Internet** access. There are plenty of **cambios** along Calle Comercio, where you can change cash but not traveller's cheques, as well as a Banco de Credito with an ATM (Visa and Mastercard). The **border crossing** with Argentina is at Pocitos, 4km south of town: to get there, take a collective taxi ($1 per person) from the main plaza.

Travel details

Trains

Quijarro to: Santa Cruz (1 daily; 20–24hr; Ferrobus 14–16hr).

Santa Cruz to: Quijarro (1 daily; 20–24hr; Ferrobus 14–16hr); Villamontes (5 weekly; 12–14hr; Ferrobus 8–10hr); Yacuiba (5 weekly; 14–16hr; Ferrobus 10–12hr).

Villamontes to: Santa Cruz (5 weekly; 12–14hr; Ferrobus 8–10hr).

Yacuiba to: Santa Cruz (5 weekly; 14–16hr; Ferrobus 10–12hr).

Buses and trufis

Buena Vista to: Santa Cruz (8–10 daily; 1hr 30min).

Concepción to: Santa Cruz (3 daily; 6–7hr).

Samaipata to: Santa Cruz (6–8 daily; 3–4hr).

San Ignacio to: La Florida (1 weekly; 12–16hr); San José (1 daily; 5–6hr); San Matías (4–6 daily; 10–12hr); Santa Cruz (3–4 daily; 10–12hr).

San Javier to: Santa Cruz (4 daily; 4–5hr).

San José to San Ignacio (1 daily; 5–6hr).

Santa Cruz to: Buena Vista (8–10 daily; 1hr 30min); Cochabamba (8–12 daily; 10–12hr); Concepción (3 daily; 6–7hr); La Paz (15–20 daily; 16–18hr); Oruro (11 daily; 12–14hr); Samaipata (6–8 daily; 3–4hr); San Ignacio (3–4 daily; 10–12hr); San Javier (4 daily; 4–5hr); Sucre (5–7 daily; 14hr); Tarija (1–2 daily; 24hr); Trinidad (12 daily; 10–12hr); Vallegrande (3–4 daily; 6–7hr); Villamontes (5–7 daily; 10–12hr); Yacuiba (5–7 daily; 12–14hr).

Vallegrande to: Cochabamba (2 weekly; 10–12hr); Santa Cruz (3–4 daily; 6–7hr).

Villamontes to: Santa Cruz (5–7 daily; 10–12hr); Yacuiba (hourly; 2hr).

Yacuiba to: Santa Cruz (5–7 daily; 12–14hr); Tarija (3–4 daily; 12hr); Villamontes (hourly; 2hr).

Planes

Santa Cruz to: Cobija (5 weekly; 2hr); Cochabamba (5 daily; 45min); La Paz (6–8 daily; 1hr 30min); Puerto Suárez (3–4 weekly; 1hr); San Ignacio (1 weekly; 35min); Sucre (2–3 daily; 40min); Tarija (5 weekly; 50min); Trinidad (2–3 daily; 1hr); Riberalta (1 daily; 2 hr 45min); Guayamerín (1 daily; 3hr).

6

The Amazon

N
BRAZIL
PERU
CHILE
ARGENTINA
PARAGUAY
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2
3
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5
6

CHAPTER 6

Highlights

- **Chalalán** Set deep in pristine Amazonian rainforest and owned by the local indigenous Tacana community, the Albergue Ecologico Chalalán is the ideal place to explore Parque Nacional Madidi, and a model of how ecotourism ought to be. See p.357

- **Río Mamoré** Sling your hammock and relax on a slow boat down this mighty wilderness river between Trinidad and the Brazilian frontier. Seep.359

- **Reserva Biosfera del Beni** Ride on horseback through the wildlife-rich savannas and forest islands of the Llanos de Moxos, where indigenous Chimane hunters still lead a semi-nomadic existence. See p.366

- **Mapajo** Explore the rainforests of the Reserva Pilon Lajas and the traditional cultures of its inhabitants from the community-owned Albergue Ecologico Mapajo. See p.376

- **Pampas del Yacuma** Caiman, capybara and pink river dolphins are just some of the wildlife you might spot on a canoe trip through the Pampas del Yacuma. See p.377

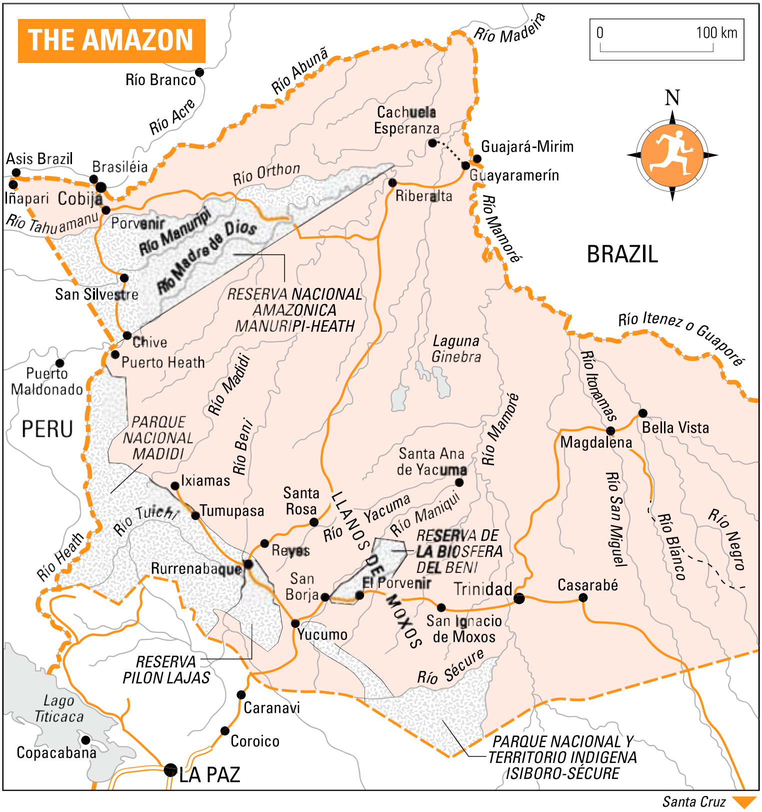
▲ Caiman in the Yacuma

6

The Amazon

About a third of Bolivia lies within the **Amazon basin**, a vast, sparsely populated and largely untamed lowland region of swamp, savannah and tropical rainforest (known as *selva)* which supports a bewildering diversity of plant and animal life. Often known as the **Beni**, after one of the rivers that are its dominant geographical feature, the Bolivian Amazon lies more than a thousand kilometres from the mainstream of the mighty River Amazon itself and occupies just a fraction of the total basin. Generally much less developed than the Brazilian Amazon – and consequently boasting a much better preserved natural environment – this is one of the most bio-diverse regions in the world, and though in recent decades the rate of forest destruction has accelerated to worrying levels, large areas remain relatively untouched and virtually unexplored. Here, jaguars, tapirs and giant anteaters roam beneath the towering forest canopy; monstrous anacondas slither through the swamps; and the skies are filled by a kaleidoscopic variety of birds. Turtles and caymans bask in the sun on the banks of the mighty rivers, which support a great variety of fish, including the much-maligned piranha, as well as playful pink freshwater dolphins.

Contrary to what you might expect, not all the region is covered by rainforest. Though the last foothills of the Andes are fringed with dense and humid **premontane forest**, the great watery plains that open up beyond are partially covered by a seemingly endless sea of savanna, dotted with islands of forest. Known as the **Llanos de Moxos** (and similar in size to the whole of Great Britain), these plains are flooded each year when the mighty rivers that meander slowly across them – the Beni, Mamoré, Guaporé and their tributaries – are swollen by the innumerable streams that rush down from the Andes and burst their banks, turning the whole area into a vast swamp. This entire wilderness region remains sparsely populated, apart from the great herds of semi-wild cattle which were first introduced by the Jesuit missionaries in the sixteenth century. Though not as spectacular or as bio-diverse as the rainforest, the Llanos de Moxos are also home to abundant wildlife – and, given the more open nature of the vegetation, it's often easier to spot. Further north, around the city of Riberalta towards the Brazilian border, the savanna gradually gives way to the high-canopied **Amazonian rainforest** more characteristic of the Amazon region as a whole, where logging and the collection of wild rubber and Brazil nuts are the only industries of any size. Though generally hot and humid all year round, the region is subject to occasional cold snaps, known as *surazos*, when weather fronts sweep in from Patagonia and the temperature drops suddenly and dramatically. Roads in the region are poor in the best of conditions and in the rainy season between November and April are often completely impassable; even in the dry season sudden downpours can quickly turn roads to quagmires.


THE AMAZON
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100 km
N
Río Madeira
Río Abunã
Río Branco
Río Acre
Cachuela Esperanza
Guajará-Mirim
Guayaramerín
Asis Brazil
Brasiléia
Iñapari
Cobija
Río Orthon
Riberalta
Río Tahuamanu
Porvenir
Río Manuripi
Río Madre de Dios
Río Mamoré
BRAZIL
San Silvestre
RESERVA NACIONAL AMAZONICA MANURIPI-HEATH
Chive
Puerto Heath
Puerto Maldonado
Laguna Ginebra
Río Itenez o Guaporé
Río Itonamas
Río Madidi
PERU
PARQUE NACIONAL MADIDI
Río Beni
Bella Vista
Magdalena
Santa Ana de Yacuma
Río Mamoré
Ixiamas
Río San Miguel
Río Blanco
Río Negro
Tumupasa
Santa Rosa
Río Tuichi
Río Yacuma
Río Maniqui
LLANOS DE MOXOS
RESERVA DE LA BIOSFERA DEL BENI
Río Heath
Reyes
Rurrenabaque
San Borja
El Porvenir
Trinidad
Casarabé
San Ignacio de Moxos
Yucumo
RESERVA PILON LAJAS
Río Sécure
Lago Titicaca
Caranavi
Coroico
Copacabana
LA PAZ
PARQUE NACIONAL Y TERRITORIO INDIGENA ISIBORO-SÉCURE
Santa Cruz

Linked by road to Santa Cruz, the capital of the Beni is **Trinidad**, a bustling frontier city with few obvious attractions, though for the adventurous it's the starting point for slow boat journeys down the Río Mamoré to the Brazilian border or south into the Chapare. From Trinidad, a long and rough road heads east across the **Llanos de Moxos**, passing through the **Reserva del Biosfera del Beni**, which is an excellent place to get close to the wildlife of the savanna, before joining the main road down into the region from La Paz at Yucumo. Just north of Yucumo, the small town of **Rurrenabaque**, on the banks of the Río Beni, is the obvious destination for anyone wanting a taste of the Amazon, given its proximity to the pristine forests of **Parque Nacional Madidi**, one of Bolivia's most stunning protected areas, and the savannas of the Llanos de Moxos along the wildlife-rich **Río Yacuma**. From Rurrenabaque the road continues north to the city of **Riberalta**, a centre for rubber and Brazil nut collection, and on to the Brazilian border and the remote, forest-covered department of **Pando**.

Some history

Recent archeological evidence suggests that the pre-Columbian Bolivian Amazon supported a populous and sophisticated society (see p.362), but by the time the Spanish arrived it had already collapsed. In the sixteenth century, inspired by the myth of a fabulously rich empire hidden somewhere in the rainforest – known as **El Dorado** or **Paititi** – the conquistadors sent several expeditions down from the Andes in a vain search for new conquests to match the incredible wealth seized from the Incas. But although the indigenous population had already been devastated by epidemics of diseases introduced from Europe, the region resisted major colonization. Most incursions ended in disaster, defeated by the ferocity of the local tribes, the dangers of the rivers, climate and wild animals, and the overwhelming immensity of the alien rainforest environment itself. Realizing there was little worth conquering in a region they referred to as *El Infierno Verde* – the "Green Hell" – the Spanish turned the region over to the religious orders, above all the Jesuits, in the hope that they might have more success in subjugating the forest tribes and securing the northeastern border with Brazil.

In the late seventeenth century a handful of **Jesuit missionaries** did just that, accomplishing in 25 years what the civil and military authorities had been unable to do in over a century. In a precursor of the theocratic society they were later to establish in Chiquitos (see box, p.326), the Jesuits founded a series of mission communities where the various indigenous tribes adopted Christianity and a settled, agricultural existence, raising cattle and growing crops. These missions flourished, and by the mid-eighteenth century were home to over 31,000 converts, supervised by just 45 European priests. But with expulsion of the Jesuits from the Spanish Empire in 1767, the mission inhabitants were left at the mercy of Spanish landowners, with many being forced into slavery.

Worse was to come in the nineteenth century as a result of the growing international demand for rubber, a material derived from trees which were particularly abundant in the Bolivian Amazon. An unprecedented economic boom ensued, and the industry was quickly dominated by a small group of ruthless **rubber barons** who made overnight fortunes and subjected the indigenous population to a brutal regime of forced labour. The most famous of these was **Nicolás Suaréz** (see p.382), who ruled over a vast rainforest empire and remains a legendary figure in the Beni.

The region remained beyond the control of the Bolivian state, a savage frontier where the only law was "article 44 of the legal code", meaning rule by the gun (the reference is to the .44 Winchester rifle). The richest rubber-producing area, the Acre, was largely settled by rubber collectors from Brazil. When the Bolivian government sought to tax rubber exports, these Brazilians rebelled and declared independence. A short conflict – **the Acre War** – ensued, ending with Bolivian defeat, and in 1903 the Acre was annexed by Brazil. In the early twentieth century, the rubber boom collapsed after the English smuggled rubber seedlings out of the Amazon and established plantations in Asia, rendering wild rubber collection uncompetitive.

By the middle of the twentieth century the economy began to recover as large landowners began exporting **cattle** (the wild descendants of those originally introduced by the Jesuits), transporting them by river to the growing markets in Brazil and in military surplus aircraft to the Altiplano. Some landowners also made great fortunes during the **cocaine** boom of the 1980s and 1990s. Strategically positioned between the coca-growing Chapare and the markets to the north, the isolated ranches of the Beni provided the perfect location for clandestine drug laboratories, and their private airstrips were ideal bases for the light aircraft that used to smuggle the cocaine north, leapfrogging through the Amazon to Colombia. Meanwhile, new roads linking the region with the rest of Bolivia opened up its natural resources for

The threat to the forest

Although the forests of the Beni can appear endless when you fly over them by plane or pass through by bus or boat, in fact, they're disappearing at an alarming rate. Every year towards the end of the dry season the skies above Bolivia are obscured by thick smoke from thousands of fires set to clear the forest for agriculture and cattle pasture, a process known as *chaqueo*. In such a vast area no one can tell exactly how fast the forests are disappearing, even with satellite monitoring, but latest estimates suggest that Bolivia is losing about two thousand square kilometres of forest a year, most of it in the Beni, with catastrophic consequences for the region's unique ecosystems.

The causes of this deforestation are various. The most obvious culprits are **timber companies**, ranging from small gangs with chainsaws to major commercial operations. Rather than clear-cutting the forest, they concentrate on valuable hardwood species such as mahogany and Spanish cedar. But for every tree they extract several others are damaged, and the trails they cut into even the most remote areas open the way for **colonists** who are responsible for even greater destruction. Successive Bolivian governments have seen the comparatively empty lands of the Amazon as a solution to poverty and land shortage in the highlands, encouraging the migration of poor farmers from the Andes, who have moved down into the lowlands, clearing the forest to plant food and cash crops. But the exuberance of the Amazonian vegetation belies the relative infertility of the soil beneath it. Most of the nutrients in the rainforest are locked in living matter, and the ecosystem survives by rapidly recycling nutrients from dead organisms before they enter the soil. When the forest cover is slashed and burned on a wide scale, these nutrients are quickly leached away by rain, and within a few years soil fertility declines so much that the land becomes useless for agriculture. Locked into a cycle of diminishing returns, the colonists are forced to move on to clear new areas of forest, and after a few years most find they have abandoned their Andean villages only to encounter a new kind of misery in the tropics. In addition, **cattle ranchers** are increasingly extending their grazing lands by clearing forested areas, further threatening the ecological balance.

Having finally recognized the potential biological value of the country's rainforests, the government has now established extensive national parks and other protected areas in the Amazon, as well as recognizing large areas as indigenous territory (arguably the most effective way of protecting the rainforest) and introducing new laws to limit logging and forest clearance. But the immense scale and remoteness of the region makes enforcing these laws almost impossible, and many of the protected areas exist only on paper. Much of the Amazon is still beyond effective government control, and the powerful local interest groups that dominate the timber industry continue to operate illegally.

exploitation and settlement from the highlands, with disastrous consequences for the environment. The struggle between conservationists, coca-growers, loggers and the region's indigenous inhabitants continues to this day – see the boxes on above and p.362.

Trinidad and around

Close to the Río Mamoré, some 500km northwest of Santa Cruz, the city of **TRINIDAD** is the capital of the Beni and the commercial and administrative centre of a vast wilderness hinterland of swamp, forest and savanna where rivers remain the main means of transport and cattle-ranching is the biggest industry.

Like most towns in the region, Trinidad was originally a Jesuit mission, but few signs of that past remain, and it's now a modern commercial city that's dominated by a vigorous cattle-ranching culture and economy. Hot and humid, with few real attractions, Trinidad doesn't really merit a visit in its own right, and though you can organize excursions into the surrounding rainforest, it's more difficult and expensive than in Rurrenabaque, where the forests are also more spectacular and better preserved. It is, however, the jumping-off point for an adventurous trip by slow boat **down the Río Mamoré** to Guayaramerín on the Brazilian border.

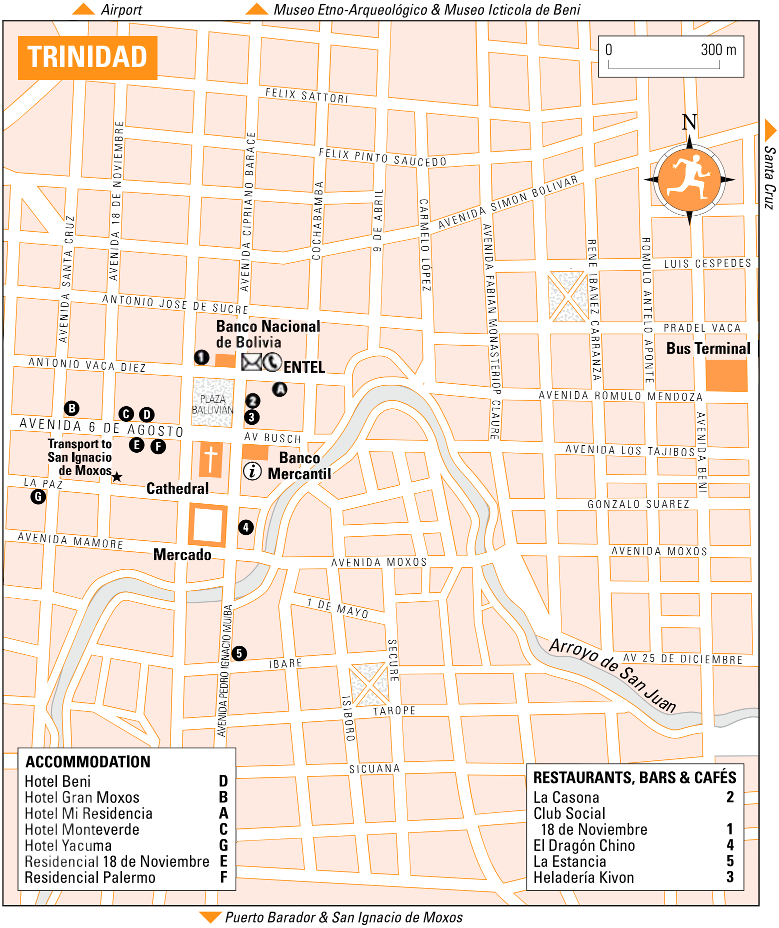
Trinidad was founded in 1686 by **Father Cipriano Barace**, a pioneering Jesuit missionary who introduced the first cattle herds to the region and was later martyred while attempting to convert the indigenous tribes on the Río Baures to the northeast. The town prospered under the Jesuits, but fell into rapid decline after their expulsion in 1767, with many of its indigenous inhabitants – drawn from several different tribes from the surrounding area but known collectively as the **Mojeños** – being dragged off to work as virtual slaves on plantations near Santa Cruz. The Mojeños were still strong enough to play an important role in the wars of independence, when an indigenous government led by Pedro Ignacio Muiba was briefly established in Trinidad in 1810, before being ruthlessly crushed by a royalist army which also stripped the town of the last valuable ornaments of the Jesuits.

With the advent of the **rubber boom** the town's population fell dramatically as thousands were forcibly recruited to work as rubber collectors in the forests to the north, while many others fled rather than face the same fate. In 1887, at the height of the rubber boom, the Mojeños launched their last uprising, a non-violent religious movement led by a messianic chief called Andrés Guayocho, who was said to be a great sorcerer and excellent ventriloquist. But the rebellion was swiftly and brutally put down by the Bolivian authorities, many of the survivors fled, and the town was left in the hands of non-indigenous merchants and landowners.

The region's **cattle economy** really developed in the second half of the twentieth century, when enterprising ranchers began cross-breeding the semi-wild cattle descended from the herds brought in by the Jesuits with sleek Xebu cattle brought in from Brazil. Until the road down from Santa Cruz was built in the 1970s, Trinidad was effectively cut off from the rest of Bolivia, and it remains an isolated and somewhat inward-looking place. The ranchers – known as *ganaderos* – see themselves as rugged, self-reliant pioneers who have tamed a wild region and created prosperity with almost no help from central government.

Arrival and information

Buses from Santa Cruz, Guayaramerín and Rurrenabaque arrive at the **terminal** on Avenida Mendoza on the corner with Calle Viador Pinto Sucedo, about eight blocks east from the centre of town. Buses from San Borja arrive just behind the terminal on Avenida Beni. Almost all buses for Santa Cruz depart in the evening between 5pm and 7pm; departures to San Borja, and to Guayaramerín via Rurrenabaque and Riberalta, leave in the morning. **Trucks and buses** from San Ignacio de Moxos arrive at the ticket office on the corner of Calle La Paz and Avenida 18 de Noviembre. The **airport**, on the outskirts of town to the northeast, is served by Amaszonas and TAM, with frequent flights from La Paz, Santa Cruz and elsewhere in the Beni. The easiest way to get around is by **motorcycle taxi**: they charge about $0.30 for journeys in the town centre, and about $1.50 to or from the airport. If you're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Museo Etno-Arqueológico & Museo Icticola de Beni
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Santa Cruz
FELIX SATTORI
FELIX PINTO SAUCEDO
AVENIDA SIMON BOLIVAR
AVENIDA 18 DE NOVIEMBRE
AVENIDA SANTA CRUZ
AVENIDA CIPRIANO BARACE
COCHABAMBA
9 DE ABRIL
CARMELO LÓPEZ
AVENIDA FABIAN MONASTERIOP CLAURE
RENE IBANEZ CARRANZA
ROMULO ANTELO APONTE
LUIS CESPEDES
PRADEL VACA
Bus Terminal
ANTONIO JOSE DE SUCRE
Banco Nacional de Bolivia
ENTEL
ANTONIO VACA DIEZ
PLAZA BALLIVIÁN
AVENIDA 6 DE AGOSTO
AV BUSCH
Banco Mercantil
Transport to San Ignacio de Moxos
Cathedral
LA PAZ
AVENIDA ROMULO MENDOZA
AVENIDA LOS TAJIBOS
AVENIDA BENI
GONZALO SUAREZ
AVENIDA MAMORE
Mercado
AVENIDA MOXOS
1 DE MAYO
AVENIDA PEDRO IGNACIO MUIBA
IBARE
SECURE
ISIBORO
TAROPE
SICUANA
Arroyo de San Juan
AV 25 DE DICIEMBRE
Puerto Barador & San Ignacio de Moxos

ACCOMMODATION	
Hotel Beni	D
Hotel Gran Moxos	B
Hotel Mi Residencia	A
Hotel Monteverde	C
Hotel Yacuma	G
Residencial 18 de Noviembre	E
Residencial Palermo	F

RESTAURANTS, BARS & CAFÉS	
La Casona	2
Club Social 18 de Noviembre	1
El Dragón Chino	4
La Estancia	5
Heladería Kivon	3

arriving by **boat** along the Río Mamoré from Guayaramerín to the north or Puerto Villaroel in the Chapare to the south (see p.291) you'll dock at **Puerto Barador**, Trinidad's river port, about 13km west of town. Frequent trucks run between the port and the intersection of Avenida Pedro Ignacio Muiba with the ring road on the outskirts of town, from where you can get a motorbike taxi into the centre.

There's a **tourist information office** (Mon–Fri 8am–12.30pm, 2.30–6 pm; ☎03/4624831) of sorts in the Prefectura building just south of the plaza on Avenida Ignacio Muiba. Go through the gate and turn right, a door on the right leads to a cramped office where the staff are friendly and try to be helpful but have only limited information about Trinidad and the surrounding area.

Accommodation

There's a good range of **accommodation** in Trinidad, most of it a short distance from the Plaza Ballivián. All the hotels listed here have fans in the rooms, but if the heat is still too much you can splash out on a room with air conditioning.

Hotel Beni Av 6 de Agosto Ⓣ03/4622788. Clean and pleasant, with well-furnished rooms; those with a/c cost twice as much as those without. ④

Hotel Gran Moxos Corner of Av Santa Cruz and Av 6 de Agosto Ⓣ03/4622240. Slightly overpriced establishment, popular with businessmen and offering spacious, elegant rooms with cool tiled floors, a/c, cable TV and fridge. Buffet breakfast included; credit cards accepted. ⑦

Hotel Mi Residencia M. Limpiaz Ⓣ03/4621529 or 4621376, Ⓕ03/4622464. Trinidad's best upmarket option, with quiet, well-decorated rooms equipped with a/c, cable TV and fridge. The hotel's annex, a few blocks away on Calle Felix Pinto Saucedo, is similar and has a swimming pool. ⑦

Hotel Monteverde Av 6 de Agosto Ⓣ03/4622750. Cool, bright and modern hotel offering comfortable rooms with TV, a/c and fridge, plus a few cheaper rooms without a/c. ④–⑤

Hotel Yacuma Corner of Av Santa Cruz and La Paz Ⓣ03/4622249. The first hotel in the Beni when it was built in 1948, and though it's now run-down and crumbling, it still retains a certain dilapidated charm, with a cool central patio and underground cisterns that store rainwater. Cheaper rooms with shared bath available. ②

Residencial 18 de Noviembre Av 6 de Agosto, two blocks west of the plaza Ⓣ03/4621272. Basic but good-value and friendly place, with a small snack bar and patio with hammocks. Cheaper rooms with shared bathroom available. ②

Residencial Palermo Av 6 de Agosto, two blocks west of the plaza Ⓣ03/4620472. Small, basic rooms around a cool, shaded patio; cheaper rooms with shared bathroom are also available. ②

The Town

Though most of its buildings are modern, Trinidad maintains the classic layout of a Spanish colonial town, its streets set out in a neat grid pattern around a central square, the **Plaza Ballivián**, which the locals proudly insist is the biggest in Bolivia. Shaded by tall trees and with well-maintained gardens, the plaza is the most popular hang-out in town and the focus of the weekend evening ritual of motorcycle courtship, when what seems like half the youth of Trinidad ride round in endless circles on motorbikes, chatting and flirting. At the centre of the plaza is an extravagant fountain decorated with herons, dolphins, a Mojeño warrior armed with a bow and several frolicking cherubs. If you look closely up to the tree-tops you may catch a glimpse of the rather miserable-looking three-toed sloths brought here by local campesinos. On the south side of the plaza, the **Cathedral** is an unexceptional modern structure built between 1916 and 1931 on the site of the earlier Jesuit church.

The buildings around the plaza and the surrounding streets are all built with eaves overhanging the pavement, designed to protect pedestrians from the harsh tropical sun and torrential Amazonian rain, while the pavements are raised up to 50cm above the ground to escape flooding in the rainy season. In addition, the streets are lined with open sewers which, while they may be necessary for drainage, emit a horrible stench, provide an ideal breeding ground for the mosquitoes that plague the town, and represent a dangerous obstacle for unwary pedestrians.

Eating

There are some pretty good **restaurants** on and around Plaza Ballivián. If you're on a tight budget try the **market**, two blocks south of the plaza, where you can get cheap filling meals, fresh fruit juices, delicious fried cheese *empanadas* and *masaco*, a deep-fried mixture of mashed plantain or yucca and dried meat. The beef in Trinidad is excellent and very good value; the local speciality is *pacumutu*, great chunks of meat and chicken marinated and grilled on a skewer.

Churrasquería La Estancia Calle Ibare 57, between Av Pedro Ignacio Muiba and Hernán Velarde. Spacious and tastefully decorated to the Estancia theme with live music and a beautiful, open-air patio area. Excellent steaks (about $4) and they have professional service. Definitely a place to splash out if you've been out in the wilderness.

Club Social 18 de Noviembre Plaza Ballivián. A vast, elegant dining hall with a rather old-fashioned feel, serving up good-value *almuerzos* and standard Bolivian dishes like *milanesa* and *pique a lo macho*.

El Dragón Chino Av Muiba opposite the market, a couple of blocks south of the plaza. Pretty good Bolivian-style Chinese food, which makes a change from endless steaks. Don't be put off by the prices on the menu: each dish serves two people, and you can order a half portion.

Heladeria Kivon Plaza Ballivián. Busy, but rather run-down, ice-cream parlour with tables looking out onto the plaza – a pleasant place to cool down with a sundae and watch the world go by. Also serves good cakes, sandwiches, main dishes and disappointing breakfasts.

La Casona Plaza Ballivián. Lively and popular place with good *almuerzos*, pizza and pasta, as well as steak and fried river fish.

Museo Etno-Arqueológico del Beni 'Kenneth Lee'

North along Avenida Cipriano Barace, the beautiful grounds of the **Museo Etno-Arqueológico** (daily 8am–12.30pm, 2.30–6pm; $1.25) are a fitting tribute to the research which suggests that a mighty and sophisticated civilization existed in the Amazon basin between 3000 and 1000 BC (see p.361). The museum is dedicated to **Kenneth Lee**, a Texan engineer who was impassioned by the Moxo people and their apparently highly advanced hydro-agricultural systems of raised fields and earth mounds. The museum itself is housed in a yellow, circular building where two rooms of ceramics, photos and storyboards outline the basic facts and findings, though leave the visitor wanting to know more. This is partly because the question remains controversial, with some people still claiming that the lines in the forest are natural. The staff are happy to try and answer questions, though

Rainforest trips from Trinidad

A couple of **tour operators** run trips into the wilderness around Trinidad. **Turismo Moxos**, Avenida 6 de Agosto 114 (ⓣ03/4621141, ⓔturmoxos@sauce.ben.entelnet.bo), organize various one- to three-day trips into the rainforest by motorized canoe along the Río Ibare, a tributary of the Mamoré, with plenty of opportunity for seeing wildlife and visiting indigenous communities. One of their trips involves staying on a privately owned ranch where the extremely rare blue-throated macaw can be seen – a must for serious birders. Trips cost around $50 per person per day.

The highly professional **Fremen** agency, Av 6 de Agosto 140 (ⓣ03/4622276, ⓦwww.andes-amazonia.com), operate similar excursions, as well as four- to six-day cruises on the Mamoré aboard the luxury floating hotel the *Reina de Enin*. They also offer more adventurous eight-day trips into the enormous Parque Nacional y Territorio Indigena Isiboro-Sécure (see p.363).

Paraiso Travel, Av 6 de Agosto 138 (ⓣ03/4620692 ⓔparaiso@entelnet.bo), also have good deals on day-trips from Trinidad and longer river trips – they are especially reasonable the larger the group size. You can also contact local guide "Papacho" (ⓣ03/462751) through this agency. He has a basic camp along the Río Ibare, a tributary of the Mamoré, with good food included for about $30 a day. He knows a lot about the area though lacks understanding of sustainable tourism.

In addition to the trips detailed in the "Around Trinidad" section on p.359, you could also try heading out to some of the isolated former **mission towns** north and east of Trinidad, either by boat (ask around at the port) or by catching a ride on a light aircraft from the airport. The towns of **Magdelena** and **Bella Vista**, to the northeast, are set amid some beautiful rainforest and have some basic tourist facilities, though the emphasis is still on expensive hunting and fishing trips rather than ecotourism. They can also be reached by a precarious road, though even in the dry season this is often impassable; trucks and buses to Magdelena and Bella Vista leave from the intersection of Avenida Ciprián Barace and the ring road, close to the airport.

they often don't know that much more than the storyboards. A series of videos on the topic is available on request.

Museo Icticola del Beni

Past the entrance to the Kenneth Lee museum on the campus of the Universidad Técnica del Beni, the **Museo Icticola del Beni** (daily 8am–3pm) is a large room of basic design which houses one of South America's most important collections of aquatic life, preserved in a series of tanks and jars. It contains over 400 samples of the weird and wonderful fish and snakes captured in rivers in Beni and Pando. At the head of the collection is the imposing Piraiba – a huge specimen with numerous, sharp-looking teeth which was caught in **Mamoré** in 1998. There is also a two-metre-long **electric eel** that could once deliver a 550-volt electric shock. The atmosphere is somewhat eerie and you have to feel sorry for the fish that don't make front-of-shelf viewing and are instead stacked up in piles behind the rest, but it is well worth a visit. If you're heading on a trip along the Mamoré, the knowledge that all of these creatures lurk in the river's murky depths may make you think twice before dangling your toes off the boat. Go past the entrance to the Kenneth Lee Museum and the university will be signposted on your right. Walk along the main campus road until you see a building decorated with some plastic models of fish to your left.

Listings

Airlines LAB, Av Santa Cruz 234 ☎03/4620595; Aerocon ☎ 03/4624442; Amaszonas Calle 18 de Noviembre 267 ☎03/4622426; TAM at the airport ☎03/4622363.

Banks and exchange The Banco Naciónal de Bolivia (Mon–Fri 8.30am–noon & 2.30–5.30pm), on the plaza, and the Banco Mercantil (Mon–Fri 8.30am–12.30pm & 2.30–6.30pm), just off the plaza on Av Pedro Ignacio Muiba, both change cash but not traveller's cheques; the latter also gives cash advances on credit cards. Otherwise, there are plenty of street moneychangers on Av 6 de Agosto.

Hospital Hospital German Busch, Bolívar with Lopez ☎118.

Internet access West side of the plaza, Cotas office has a few computers with reasonably fast connection.

Laundry Lavanderia Pro Vida, Felix Sattori just off Av Nicolás Suárez.

Motorbike hire Bikes are available all over town; the easiest place to find one is on the plaza, where there's always a group of people waiting to rent out their machines. A basic moped will cost about $1.60 an hour; a 125cc dirt bike about $2 an hour; daily rates are negotiable. You'll need to leave your passport as a deposit. If you're heading out of town or carrying a passenger it's worth paying slightly extra for a more powerful bike.

Post office Just off the plaza on Av Ciprian Barace (Mon–Sat 8am–noon, 2.30–6pm).

Telephone office The ENTEL office (Mon–Fri 7.30am–11pm, Sat & Sun 8am–10pm) is in the same building as the post office, just off the plaza on Av Cipriano Barace.

Around Trinidad

The area immediately around Trinidad is dominated by the **Río Mamoré**, which runs through a landscape of forest, swamp and lakes, dotted with the artificial mounds left by the mysterious pre-Columbian Moxos civilization. About 13km west of the city, **PUERTO BARADOR** is Trinidad's main river port and makes a worthwhile and easy excursion. There are several ramshackle riverside restaurants where you can eat fresh fried fish and watch the boats that ply the length of the Río Mamoré carrying cattle and other cargo being slowly loaded and unloaded – you may also catch a glimpse of pink river dolphins frolicking in the water. Frequent trucks run to the port from the intersection of

Avenida Pedro Ignacio Muiba with the ring road on the outskirts of Trinidad, and it's also easy to reach by motorbike. The journey out there involves a short river crossing by ferry at **Puerto Almacen**, a smaller port on the Río Ibare, a tributary river that flows into the Mamoré just north of Trinidad.

Loma Suárez and Loma Chuchuni

Another dirt road runs about 10km northeast of Trinidad to **Loma Suárez**, an artificial mound on the banks of the Río Ibare that's believed to have been built by the ancient Moxos civilization (see box, opposite). Once the local headquarters of the Suárez rubber empire, the mound is now covered by buildings belonging to the navy, and you may have to show your passport on arrival. There are good views from the top of the mound and you'll see plenty of birdlife.

From Loma Suárez, the road continues another 5km or so to **Loma Chuchuni**, another ancient mound that's now the centre of a small private ecological reserve and visitors' centre. It makes an interesting day-trip from Trinidad, though there's no public transport so you'll have to come by motorbike, and sadly the Hinojosa family who run it charge a rather excessive $10 per person to visit. There's also a small **museum** housing a collection of potshards and other minor artefacts from the Moxos culture that were found during excavations on the mound.

Less inspiring are the many **caged animals** on display, including pumas, jaguars and ocelots – a fairly depressing spectacle. The family also offers **guided tours** on foot and by canoe through the surrounding forest and swamp, which are relatively undisturbed and home to a great variety of wildlife. Food and drink are available, and there are a few comfortable but overpriced **cabins for four people with private bathrooms** where you can stay the night – it's $210 per person for a three-day package including collection from Trinidad. Contact the Hinojosa family in Trinidad on Ⓣ03/4624744, or Ⓔchuchini70@hotmail.com.

Down the Río Mamoré

From Puerto Barador you can get a ride on the regular cargo boats that ply the waters of the **Río Mamoré**, either downstream to Guayaramerín on the Brazilian border or upstream as far as Puerto Villarroel in the Chapare (see p.271). In places more than 3km wide, the mighty Mamoré – its name means "Great Mother" in Moxeño – was once one of the great waterways of the Bolivian Amazon and still sees a good deal of traffic. Canoes, barges and double-decker river boats ply its silt-laden waters, carrying supplies to the isolated communities along the river bank, collecting cargoes of timber or bananas, and carrying cattle downstream to markets in Brazil.

Travelling this way is one of the classic Amazon experiences, and an excellent way to get a feel for the immense scale of the forest and the lifestyle of its inhabitants. The river boats glide through the forest at a languid pace, with plenty of opportunities for spotting wildlife along the way, particularly cayman, pink river dolphins and innumerable birds. Every so often the dense vegetation of the river bank breaks to reveal a riverside settlement, usually no more than a cluster of thatched houses on stilts. For the villagers, isolated in the midst of this immense wilderness, the arrival of a boat can be the main event of the day, and if yours stops to load or unload cargo it's likely to be besieged by locals selling bananas or fish, or simply seeking the latest news and gossip from upriver.

Though if it's rainy season, think twice about ventures along the river. Clouds of mosquitoes plague the riverside and have the power to make even the most hardy and adventurous travellers feel miserable.

Moundbuilders of the Amazon

Long before the Spaniards first arrived in the Americas, the Incas told stories of a mighty civilization in the watery plains to the east of the Andes. In the fifteenth century the Inca Yupanqui sent a great army down one of the rivers of the Upper Amazon in search of this kingdom. After a long and perilous journey the depleted Inca force eventually came across a numerous and warlike nation known as the Musu, or **Moxos**. Heavily outnumbered, the Incas were in no position to conquer the Moxos, but instead offered them an alliance. The Moxos accepted, and allowed the surviving Inca warriors to settle amongst them. This story suggests that in the Moxos, the Incas had found their equals, and when the Spanish heard this tale, it fuelled the growing legend of **El Dorado** – the belief that hidden somewhere in the depths of the Amazon there existed a wealthy and powerful kingdom. In the sixteenth century numerous Spanish expeditions went down into the Amazon in search of this mythical realm, which was also known as **Paitití**, the land of the celestial jaguar. Nothing was ever found, however, to match their dreams of wealth and conquest, and most explorers encountered only despair and an untimely death in the hostile rainforest environment.

Until about thirty years ago archeologists doubted that any large, settled population could ever have survived in the Amazon Basin. The accepted wisdom was that the region's thin, acidic soils made intensive agriculture impossible, and that the area could support only small, scattered communities practising slash-and-burn agriculture along with hunting and gathering. But subsequent research has suggested that the forests and savannas of the Llanos de Moxos were in fact once densely populated by well-organized societies who, sometime between 3000 BC and 1000 BC, modified the environment on a massive scale to allow intensive agriculture and large urban settlements. The region is dotted with hundreds of raised earth mounds, known as **lomas**, most of which are covered by forest. Seen from the ground, these mounds are hardly impressive, and were long thought to be merely the remnants of natural levees left by rivers as they meandered across the plain. But when archeologists looked at these mounds from the air, they realized they were far too extensive and regular to be natural. Instead, they concluded that they were the remnants of a massive system of earthworks – including raised fields, canals, causeways, reservoirs, dykes and mounds stretching over hundreds of square kilometres – that could only have been built by a large and well-organized society.

Excavations on some of the mounds revealed that they had been built up over many centuries. By cultivating these raised mounds, researchers believe the ancient inhabitants of the Moxos were able to overcome the problems of poor soil and seasonal flooding and drought, producing enough food to support a population density much greater than was previously believed possible in the Amazon. The network of canals, weirs and causeways, meanwhile, is thought to have provided a sophisticated water management system that converted the seasonally flooded plains into a huge fish farm, overcoming the protein scarcity that is considered the main limitation on population growth in the Amazon. That the Spanish never found this civilization is due to the fact that – perhaps as a result of European-introduced epidemics or sustained drought – the whole social network collapsed shortly before they reached the region, and the abandoned raised field systems were colonized by forest.

These recent discoveries have enormous implications for both conservation and development in the Amazon. They suggest that, far from being a fragile natural environment, large areas of the Amazon are in fact **anthropogenic**, or man-made, ecosystems, modified by centuries of human activity and capable of supporting far larger populations than is currently the case. Not surprisingly, these interpretations remain controversial, with some researchers continuing to claim that the mounds and causeways of the Moxos are in fact natural. But as more and more evidence is uncovered, the argument that the Llanos de Moxos were once home to a large and sophisticated civilization becomes ever more compelling.

Boats depart up- and down-river two or three times a week, though when river levels fall in the dry season the route south to Puerto Villaroel can be impassable. The trip downstream to Guayaramerín takes between three days and a week, depending on the level of the river, the size and power of the boat, whether it's equipped to travel by night, and how many stops it makes to load and unload cargo; upstream to Puerto Villaroel takes five to seven days. Both trips should cost between $20 and $30 including meals, but be prepared to bargain. The **food** served on board the boats is usually pretty bland, consisting mainly of rice, plantains and *charque*, so it's worth taking along fresh fruit and maybe some tinned food. You should also take drinking **water** or purifiers. Accommodation on board is fairly basic; you'll need your own hammock to string up on deck as well as a mosquito net if the boat is likely to moor at night. Comfort varies considerably and you should take some care when choosing which boat to travel in and securing your hammock space; sleeping beside an unsilenced diesel engine for a week is not much fun, for example, while stringing your hammock above a cargo of steaming cattle has obvious disadvantages.

The **Distrito Naval** (navy headquarters) on Avenida 6 de Agosto in Trinidad usually has information on departures, but you're better off heading to Puerto Barador to talk with officials at the **Capitanía del Puerto** (port authority) office and the boat captains to check departure dates and arrange passage. You may have to wait around a few days before getting a ride; some

Indigenous peoples of the Bolivian Amazon

The Bolivian Amazon is home to more than twenty indigenous peoples, each with their own distinct language and culture, ranging in size from the **Moxeños**, who number around 40,000, to groups like the **Araona**, now reduced to no more than about a hundred people. Between them, the populations of these indigenous tribes now number in the region of 100,000, a mere fraction of the population which lived here before the arrival of European diseases and the near-genocidal impact of the rubber boom, when huge numbers were enslaved and forced to work in appalling conditions. After centuries of external contact – with conquistadors, missionaries, rubber barons, soldiers, drug traffickers, anthropologists and now tourists – many of the indigenous people of the Amazon now speak Spanish and have adopted a fairly conventional Bolivian lifestyle, engaging in the market economy as workers and consumers and preferring rubber boots and football shirts to their traditional hand-made costumes. However, many others still survive by hunting, fishing and cultivating manioc and other crops in small clearings in the forest, much as they have done for thousands of years, and relying for medicine on the powers of traditional healers and their encyclopedic knowledge of thousands of different rainforest plants. The most traditional indigenous groups are the uncontacted tribes – known as the **Nahuas** and **Toromonas** – small nomadic bands thought to be living deep in the rainforest who eschew all contact with Bolivian society.

Largely dependent on the rainforest for their livelihoods, the indigenous peoples of the Bolivian Amazon were amongst the first to recognize the danger posed by the gathering pace of deforestation. In 1990 they staged the first of several "**Marches for Territory and Dignity**", walking 650km from Trinidad to La Paz to demand the recognition of their right to land and self-determination. This campaign drew international attention to their plight and led to new legislation and the recognition of large areas of the Beni as indigenous territorial reserves. Though huge areas of territory still remain to be titled, and the bureaucratic process is obstructed at every turn by cattle ranchers and logging companies, the indigenous peoples of Bolivia are gradually regaining control of their own lands.

captains will let you sleep on board while awaiting departure. In the past few years, captains have become more reluctant to take on travellers, apparently due to safety issues.

Parque Nacional y Territorio Indígena Isiboro-Sécure

Starting some 80km southeast of Trinidad, about 12,000 square kilometres of rainforest are protected (on paper at least) by **Parque Nacional y Reserva Indígena Isiboro-Sécure**, a beautiful wilderness region between the Ríos Isiboro and Sécure, which rush down from the rugged, forest-covered Cordillera de Mosetenes, the last ridge of the Andes north of Cochabamba. As its name states, Isiboro-Sécure is both a national park and the semi-autonomous territory of the indigenous Moxeño, Yuyucare and T'simane peoples, who live here in fifty or so small and isolated communties, mostly on the banks of the two rivers. Unfortunately, the park lies just north of the coca-growing Chapare region (see p.271), and in recent decades has been used for smuggling and as a hiding place for cocaine laboratories. It's also faced a continual invasion by loggers and settlers from the Andes, many of them displaced from the Chapare and looking for somewhere to grow coca away from the prying eyes of the security forces.

All of this has provoked a bitter conflict with the indigenous population, who are understandably anxious to defend their territory. Given the present situation, independent travel to Isiboro-Sécure is dangerous and shouldn't be attempted – a shame, as otherwise the park would make an exciting backdoor route by boat between the Chapare and Trinidad. If you're still keen, the tour operator **Fremen**, which has offices in Cochabamba, La Paz, Santa Cruz and Trinidad (see under organized tours sections in each city), sometimes runs visits to the park, starting in Cochabamba and ending in Trinidad. There is a huge potential for tourism in the park, and at the time of writing there are various plans for ecotourism projects involving the park's indigenous people.

The Llanos de Moxos

East of Trinidad stretches the vast, watery plain known as the **Llanos de Moxos** (or Mojos). Spanning the area between the ríos Mamoré and Beni, the region is largely covered by seasonally flooded savanna or natural grassland interspersed with swamp and patches of forest. During the November to April rainy season, the whole area is flooded for months at a time and the road becomes impassable, while during the dry season between May and September the grasslands become very dry, resembling the savannas of Africa much more than the lush greenery usually associated with the Amazon basin.

This is **cowboy country**, and the economy of the plains is dominated by enormous ranches, stocked with the semi-wild descendants of the cattle first introduced by the Jesuits in the seventeenth century. Some individual ranchers have herds numbering tens of thousands, and travelling by road you'll often find the way blocked by cattle being led to market over hundreds of kilometres by mounted men little different in appearance and lifestyle from the iconic cowboys of the nineteenth-century North American West. To complete the illusion, the Llanos are also home to semi-nomadic indigenous groups such as the T'simane (or Chimane), for whom hunting is still an important source of food, though shotguns have largely replaced bows and arrows as the weapon of choice.

Savanna ecology

The **origin of the savannas** of the Llanos de Moxos is debatable. Certainly much of the open vegetation is of natural origin. Rainfall levels in the region are lower than elsewhere in Amazonia, and many tree species cannot tolerate the extreme alternation between flooding in the rainy season and severe desiccation in the unusually long dry season. But the region has also been grazed by cattle and burned by ranchers – and indigenous tribes before them – for hundreds of years. It may be that the existing vegetation is the result of a shifting ecological balance between nature and human activity known as **fire climax**, and that the boundary between forest and grassland has always been variable. Indeed, some ecologists believe such fluctuations may have been a prime cause of the exceptional biodiversity in Amazonia today. During the Pleistocene era, they argue, changes in climate and rainfall over thousands of years meant the forest cover in the region was periodically reduced to small isolated tracts, where species evolved in isolation. When the forest cover expanded again, these species would be mixed with others that had evolved separately to fill the same ecological niches, thus increasing species diversity. However, there's growing concern that the expansion of cattle-ranching in recent decades, with larger areas being burned and the introduction of new grass species, is increasing the extent of the savanna at the expense of the rainforest, disturbing the delicate equilibrium established between humans and nature over many centuries.

Away from the former mission towns of **San Ignacio de Moxos** and **San Borja**, the Llanos remain a sparsely populated wilderness where most of the wild animal species of the Amazon still thrive, and because of the open vegetation they can be easier to spot than in the forest. Even from the road, the **birdlife** you'll see here is spectacular and abundant, with water species like storks and herons being particularly evident. Jaguars also abound, despite the efforts of ranchers to protect their herds, and you may also spot species not found in the forest, like the maned wolf, a long-legged, solitary hunter that moves through the high grasses with a loping stride, or the rhea, a large flightless bird similar to the ostrich. A few hours west of San Ignacio, a large area of this distinctive environment is protected by the **Reserva de la Biosfera del Beni**, Bolivia's longest-established protected area, which has excellent facilities.

San Ignacio de Moxos

About 100km west of Trinidad lies **SAN IGNACIO DE MOXOS**, the only town of any size between San Borja and Trinidad – the journey here involves three river crossings by barge, where there's a good chance of spotting pink dolphins playing in the water. It's a trip that is next to impassable in the heavy rain. Originally founded by Jesuit missionaries in 1689, San Ignacio is a poor town, where horse- or ox-drawn carts are as common as motor vehicles, and with a largely indigenous population that retains more of the traditions of the Jesuit era than any other town in the Beni. For most of the year it's a sleepy backwater except from July 28 to 31, when it rouses itself from its tropical torpor to celebrate its patron saint's day with processions, dancing and drinking in what's considered the greatest **folkloric festival** in the Bolivian Amazon. The highlights of the fiesta are the elaborate costumed dances performed by the area's indigenous Moxeño population. Dressed in crowns of feathers, long cotton robes and carved wooden masks, they dance to the music of metre-long woodwind instruments and violins which bear a striking resemblance to those the Jesuits taught their ancestors to make. The most famous dance, known as the

Machetero, is a thinly veiled portrayal of the struggles of the Moxos against Spanish rule. Similar celebrations are held during Holy Week, though these tend to attract fewer visitors.

The Town

There's not much to do in San Ignacio outside fiesta times, but it's a friendly, laid-back place where time seems to stand still. Many of the houses are simple, palm-thatched cane structures, but the main **plaza** is lined with stone houses with tiled roofs which extend over the pavement to provide shelter from the harsh tropical sun and frequent rain. In its centre stands a **statue** of an indigenous warrior in the same costume as that worn by the *Machetero* dancers during the fiesta, while on the east side stands the **Iglesia de San Ignacio**, the town's physical and spiritual centre. Built in the barn-like style favoured by the Jesuits, its interior is brightly painted in a beautiful naïve style with scenes from the life of Ignacio Loyola, the mercenary soldier turned saint who founded the Jesuit order. His statue stands behind the altar where you would normally expect to see Christ. The church is run by Spanish Jesuit priests, who are once again heavily involved in defending the rights of the indigenous population against logging companies and large landowners, and who continue to inspire a deep faith in their congregation. Thousands of people attend Mass on Sundays, when religious singing inside the church is sometimes accompanied by music and ritual dancing outside.

The town proudly possesses one of the most important **archives** of Moxeña music, located on Calle Ballivián and Calle Santiesteban, right next to the church. Inaugurated in July 2003, the collection contains over 4000 pages of music. A 20-minute walk north of the plaza brings you to the attractive **Laguna Isirere**, where you can relax and observe the abundant birdlife. Legend has it that the lagoon was once a small pond of water and a boy named Isidoro walked in it, despite his mother's pleas otherwise. It grew larger until he was swallowed up by the water. Locals believe it was "**Jichi**", the spiritual soul of the water who wanted to sacrifice the boy in order to gain more power. They say that anyone who drinks from the lagoon will never leave San Ignacio.

Practicalities

Buses to and from Trinidad arrive and depart from one of two transport syndicate offices, either on the main square or a block away on Calle Santisteban, the road that heads out of town to the east. There are three **places to stay** on the main square, all of them fairly simple but clean, with fans and a choice between shared or private bathrooms. The *Residencial Don Joaquin* (☎03/4822112; ②) has a pleasant courtyard garden with hammocks; the *Hotel San Ignacio* (☎03/4822063; ②) has cool rooms with high ceilings; while the *Hotel Plaza* (☎03/4822032; ②) is a little more basic. Prices tend to double at fiesta times, when beds are very difficult to find.

There are several basic **restaurants** on Calle Santisteban, all of which open late and close early: the most popular is the *Cherlis*, where through buses usually stop for lunch, and *Restaurante El Viajero*, which is about eight blocks further south along Santisteban, serving a good *milenesa* and set-menu deals. The only upmarket alternative is the *Pescadería San Francisco*, a block from the plaza on the road that runs beside the church. For an early breakfast, head for the small covered **market** on Calle Santisteban. **Moving on**, if you're heading east, buses to Trinidad leave early in the morning – there's usually only one departure a day, so it's worth buying a ticket the night before. Through buses between

Trinidad and San Borja and beyond usually stop here for lunch: if you're heading west, these are your best bet.

Reserva de la Biosfera del Beni

Covering some 1350 square kilometres of savanna and rainforest to the east of San Borja, the **Reserva de la Biosfera del Beni** (Beni Biosphere Reserve) was one of the first protected areas to be established in Bolivia. Standing at the intersection of two important biogeographical zones, the reserve is exceptionally bio-diverse, hosting some 500 species of birds and 100 species of mammals – these include almost half the protected species in Bolivia, among them many that are in danger of extinction. Illegal hunting, unfortunately, still poses a major threat.

Unusually for Bolivia, the reserve also has very well-organized facilities for visitors, based at the **Beni Biological Station** at El Porvenir, a former ranch about 100km west of San Ignacio on the road to San Borja. Though most of the reserve is actually rainforest, the area immediately around El Porvenir is largely savanna, a seemingly endless sea of natural grasses up to 2m high, dotted with islands of forest. The reserve is open all year round, but during the rainy season the whole area becomes flooded and the road is impassable, so you can really only visit between May and October.

Exploring the reserve

As well as organizing food and accommodation, the park rangers (see p.367) can arrange for villagers from the nearby community of Totaizal to take you on tours in the reserve on foot or on **horseback** (prices for walking tours are given below; horseback tours cost around an extra $10 per day). Walking through the savanna is arduous, particularly in the heat of the day, but riding is less taxing and also raises you above the savanna grasses. The most popular tour is the half-day trip through the savanna to **Laguna Normandia** ($10 per person), a large lake which you can cruise around in canoes in search of the abundant but elusive black cayman that patrol the dark waters. The lake

▲ Beni river canyon

is also home to an astonishing variety and number of herons and other wading birds, as well as a great number of snail kites. Another good half-day excursion is the **Sabana** tour ($12 per person), which involves visiting some of the **forest islands** that dot the savanna – these range from small copses to patches of forest several kilometres across. Much of the research conducted at the reserve is aimed at understanding these islands and the shifting balance between them and the surrounding grasslands. The islands support much the same wildlife as the rainforest proper, including red howler monkeys, whose eerie dawn chorus is one of the Amazon's most unforgettable sounds, and several different species of macaw.

A good day- or overnight trip is the **Torres** ($25 per person including a horse and food), which involves riding through swamp and high grassland to three different observation towers, from where panoramic views bring home the sheer scale of the savanna and reveal the gradual transition between grassland and forest. The last tower is on the fringes of the forests to the north of the reserve, where you can camp overnight in a basic shelter – with a little luck you may see a rare swamp deer or armadillo.

Other overnight and more extended trips, for which you'll need your own camping gear, include **El Trapiche** ($25 per person, $30 with food), a two-day trip which takes you to an abandoned sugar mill further into the reserve, with correspondingly better chances of seeing wildlife. For the more adventurous, the three-day **La Pascana** circuit ($60 per person, $75 with food) takes you deep into the forests in the north of the reserve and offers good chances of spotting larger mammals such as deer or even jaguars. This trip also takes you into part of the 300 square kilometres of the reserve that has been recognized as the territory of the semi-nomadic indigenous T'simane, part of a much larger indigenous territorial reserve which stretches south of El Porvenir – this area is sometimes off limits when the T'simane are hunting in the area. Finally, for those looking for a more serious wilderness experience it's also possible to accompany the park rangers on their regular four-day **patrols** ($85 per person including food) to guard against loggers.

Practicalities

If you're travelling in a big group it's probably worth phoning the reserve office in San Borja, which is on Trinidad with 18 de Noviembre (Ⓣ03/8953895 or 03/8953898) a day in advance to let them know you're coming, but otherwise it's fine to arrive at El Porvenir unannounced. To reach the biological station take any bus or truck heading east from San Borja or west from San Ignacio and ask the driver to let you off at El Porvenir, about 50km from San Borja. **Admission** to the reserve costs $5 per person and **accommodation** in basic but clean barrack-like rooms with shared bathrooms costs $12 per person, including three meals a day, or $9 a day if you bring your own equipment and **camp**. They also have an extensive scientific library which visitors can use and a small exhibition of T'simane crafts; in addition, local T'simane sometimes bring bows and woven baskets to sell to visitors. **Moving on** from El Porvenir can be tricky: your only option is to try to flag down one of the few passing vehicles.

San Borja

About 140km east of San Ignacio de Moxos and 40km east of El Porvenir, **SAN BORJA** is an uneventful former mission town with a surprisingly prosperous feel, reflecting the wealth of the big cattle ranchers who dominate the surrounding region, as well as the possible involvement of some of its residents in the even more lucrative cocaine business. That said, though, it's a peaceful place with a pleasant central square that serves as a market and supply centre for outlying ranches.

There's no reason to stop here, but if you're heading for the Beni Biosphere Reserve from the west you might have to **spend the night** before catching the regular morning bus east to Trinidad; the driver is usually happy to take passengers to the reserve entrance at Porvenir. If you do, the *Hotel San Borja* (☎03/8953291; ②–⑥) on the central plaza is the best place in town, with a range of rooms to suit all budgets; the *Hotel Tropico* (①) a couple of blocks away, is a little more basic.

There are a few simple **restaurants** on and around the plaza which serve cheap *almuerzos* and occasionally set up outdoor barbecues on the street, roasting juicy slabs of local beef over charcoal fires. *Heladeria Pato Roca*, south of the plaza on Calle La Paz, serves run-of-the-mill but refreshing ice creams. The FFP Prodem bank a block from the square on Calle Selim Majluf will **change US dollars**, as will the Comercial El Chiman hardware store opposite. Daily **buses** to Trinidad, Guayaramerín and La Paz leave early in the morning from the bus terminal, a $0.50 motorcycle taxi ride away on the outskirts of town. For transport to Yucumo head down to the *paradero* (bus stop) on the main road, from where trucks leave when there are enough passengers – your chances are best early in the morning.

Yucumo

About 50km southwest of San Borja the road across the Llanos de Moxos from Trinidad joins the road down from La Paz into the Beni at the scruffy settlement of **YUCUMO**, populated largely by Aymara migrants. The entire road down here from Caranavi in the Yungas (see p.168) has been heavily settled by poor migrants from the highlands, with devastating environmental consequences: the landscape is now dominated by scrubby cattle pasture and secondary forest growth, and the migrants are not much better off than they were in the highland villages they abandoned to seek a new life in the tropical lowlands.

From Yucumo it's another 100km or so north to Rurrenabaque; there's no scheduled bus service but traffic's fairly regular and truck drivers often stop here for meals, so if you're heading to Rurrenabaque you can just flag down anything that's moving in that direction. Heading west, several trucks and pick-ups carry passengers daily between Yucumo and San Borja. If you get stuck overnight you can find a **room** at the basic *Hotel Tropical* (no phone; ②), which also has a reasonable restaurant.

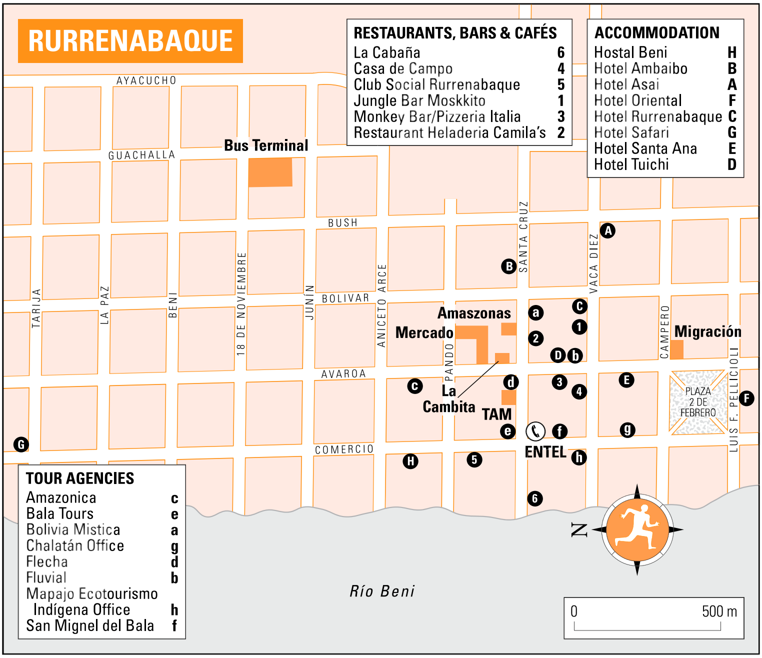
Rurrenabaque

Set on the banks of the Río Beni some 430km by road north of La Paz, the small town of **RURRENABAQUE** has emerged in recent years as by far the most popular ecotourism destination in the Bolivian Amazon, and with good reason. Standing between the last forest-covered foothills of the Andes and the great lowland plains, Rurrenabaque is close to some of the best-preserved and most accessible wilderness areas in the region, including the spectacular rainforests of **Parque Nacional Madidi** and the **Reserva de Biosfera y Territorio Indígena Pilon Lajas**, as well as the wildlife-rich pampas along the **Río Yacuma**, all of which are easily visited with one of Rurrenabaque's numerous tour agencies. It's also the easiest Amazon town to reach from La Paz, though that's not saying much. By air it's a short and spectacular flight across the cordillera (though be warned that the runway is not paved so heavy rain can prevent both landing and take-off for days at a time; at these times many tour agencies offer the option of services to La Paz), but by road the trip down through the Yungas is a gruelling adventure that takes at least eighteen hours, though it can be broken with a stopoff in Coroico (see p.168).

Rurrenabaque first came to prominence during the **rubber boom** in the late nineteenth century, serving as the gateway to the Amazon region from the highlands. Until recently, the extraction and processing of **timber** from the surrounding rainforest was Rurrenabaque's main industry, but this has been curtailed somewhat by the exhaustion of valuable timber species and the establishment of Parque Nacional Madidi and other protected areas. The developing **ecotourism industry** has emerged as one of the few economic alternatives to this highly destructive and largely illegal activity.

Arrival and accommodation

The military airline TAM has five weekly **flights** to Rurrenabaque from La Paz. Amaszonas also offers up to four daily flights in high season from La Paz and one from Santa Cruz. These arrive at the airstrip a short distance north of the town, and are met by a shuttle bus which will take you to the TAM office in the centre of town. **Buses** arrive at the Terminal Terrestre a few blocks away from the centre of town on the corner of Calle Guachalla and Calle 18 de


RURRENABAQUE
RESTAURANTS, BARS & CAFÉS
La Cabaña 6
Casa de Campo 4
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Jungle Bar Moskkito 1
Monkey Bar/Pizzeria Italia 3
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ACCOMMODATION
Hostal Beni H
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Hotel Safari G
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AYACUCHO
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Bus Terminal
BUSH
BOLIVAR
AVAROA
COMERCIO
TARIJA
LA PAZ
BENI
18 DE NOVIEMBRE
JUNÍN
ANICETO ARCE
PANDO
SANTA CRUZ
VACA DIEZ
CAMPERO
LUIS F. PELLICIOLI
Amaszonas
Mercado
La Cambita
TAM
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Migración
PLAZA 2 DE FEBRERO
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Noviembre; you can get a motorbike taxi into the centre for about $0.25. When the road is closed in the rainy season, **motorized canoes** occasionally carry passengers between Rurrenabaque and Guanay (see p.174) and Riberalta (see p.378); they moor on the beach at the end of Calle Santa Cruz. In general, though, the Río Beni is rarely used for long-distance transport, as moving goods and passengers by road is far cheaper, although it's still fairly busy with local traffic.

There are no banks in Rurrenabaque. Some tour agencies accept payment with **traveller's cheques** and credit cards, and may change cheques or advance cash on credit cards; try the Jungle Bar Moskkito. The tourist information office on Calle Avaroa, on the opposite side from *Hotel Tuichi* (Mon–Fri 8am–noon and 2.30–6pm; Sat & Sun 8–10am) offers a good map of the town and basic information about the national park, but the most useful feature is a message board where other travellers leave comments about the tours they've just returned from.

Accommodation

For a small town, Rurrenabaque has an impressive number of **places to stay**, though rooms can still be difficult to find in high season (May–Aug), particularly if you arrive in the evening after the flights from La Paz have come in; if you're going on a tour it's a good idea to book a room for your return (all places will store luggage when you're out on a tour). Unless otherwise mentioned, everywhere listed has hot water and fans, though the water and electricity supply is less reliable in the cheaper places.

Hostal Beni Comercio with Pando ☎03/8922408. Clean and modern rooms with cool, tiled floors (you can pay more for a/c); traveller's cheques accepted. ②–④

Hotel Ambaibo Santa Cruz with Bolívar, ☎03/8922017. Good mid-range option with comfortable beds and private bathrooms. American breakfast and access to swimming pool included. ⑤–⑥

Hotel Asai Vaca Diez with Bush ☎03/8922439. A touch classier and more expensive than Rurrenabaque's other budget places, with clean, spacious rooms with cool tiled floors set around a peaceful shaded courtyard. ③

Hotel Oriental Plaza 2 de Febrero ☎03/8922401. One of the most appealing budget options, with cool, comfortable rooms (with or without bathroom) set around a peaceful courtyard garden with hammocks. ③

Hotel Rurrenabaque Vaca Diez and Bolívar ☎03/8922481. Pleasant two-storey hotel with basic but clean rooms, with or without bathroom, some with balconies overlooking the street. ③

Hotel Safari Comerico and Tarija ☎03/8922210 or 8922410. A 10min walk from the town centre, this is popular with wealthy weekenders from La Paz, with comfortable and spacious cabins set around a swimming pool and a restaurant overlooking the river. ⑤

Hotel Santa Ana Corner of Avaroa and Vaca Diez ☎03/8922399. Clean, pleasant rooms (with or without bath) set around a cool courtyard garden and a large, hammock-filled patio. ②–③

Hotel Tuichi Avaroa and Av Santa Cruz (no phone). Popular backpackers' hotel with basic, rather cramped rooms with or without bath. It's also a good place to put together tour groups with the Fluvial and Amazonica tour agencies, which are operated by the same family that runs the hotel. ②–③

The Town

Picturesquely located on a broad sweep of the Río Beni, with steep, densely forested hills rising behind, Rurrenabaque – or "Rurre", as it's know to its residents – maintains a real frontier feel, despite its growing importance as an ecotourism destination. It's a friendly town, with a languid, laid-back charm that's typical of the Amazon, and though there's not a great deal to see or do, it's a pleasant place to relax while you prepare for a trip into the surrounding wilderness, while after a few nights camping out in the forest or pampas, even Rurre's modest charms can seem luxurious.

Other than a few shabby modern brick and concrete structures in the centre, Rurrenabaque's dirt streets are lined with traditional palm-thatched wooden houses. Official buildings are clustered around the pleasant **Plaza 2 de Febrero** at the south end of town, but most commercial activity is concentrated along the first few blocks of **Calles Avaroa** and **Comercio**, which run north from the plaza parallel to the river, lined with ramshackle stores selling hammocks, rubber boots, machetes, chainsaws, tinned food and other supplies for people living in the surrounding area. The riverside itself is an interesting place to while away the time watching canoes arriving along the Beni and unloading cargoes of bananas or freshly caught fish. It's particularly lively during the small Sunday-morning **market**, when indigenous people from the hinterlands of the surrounding rainforest come to town to pick up supplies and sell fish, agricultural produce and (for tourists) handicrafts like woven baskets and wooden bows.

At the corner of Avoroa and Santa Cruz, a wonderful *artesania* store, **La Cambita**, is run by Natsumi who buys jewellery and other craftwork from surrounding communities and sells them in her professionally laid-out shop. Each piece of work is initialled with the name of the artist and a corresponding board provides a name and photograph.

If you've got some time on your hands you can take the **ferry** (every 10min; $0.15) across the river to the small village of **San Buenaventura** on the opposite bank; this is inside the department of La Paz, so for bureaucratic reasons several public buildings are located here rather than in Rurrenabaque, including the Parque Nacional Madidi administration office.

Eating and drinking

A large number of **restaurants** have sprung up in Rurrenabaque to cater to the ecotourism boom, with most serving Bolivian dishes along with gringo favourites like pizza and pasta. Local river fish is particularly delicious, especially the succulent *surubi*. Several local places on Calle Comercio serve cheap *almuerzos* and fried chicken, and there's a good variety of fresh fruit juices available in the **market** on Calle Avaroa.

La Cabaña Bottom of Av Santa Cruz by the riverbank. Large meat and fish dishes and filling *almuerzos*; it's also a great place to drink a cold beer and watch the sunset over the Río Beni.

Casa de Campo Calle Vacadiez with Avaroa. The best food in Rurre. Perfect if you're lusting for something more healthy and wholesome than standard backpacker fare, with natural fruit juices, soups, salads and freshly made sandwiches. Run by a wonderfully warm couple, Adela and Luís, who prepare tasty meals and snacks to order and serve coffee to die for. Open 7am–9pm.

Club Social Rurrenabaque Comercio with Av Santa Cruz. A bit scruffy but good-value establishment, popular among locals, with a massive open-air patio overlooking the river where uniformed waiters serve big portions of meat and fish, as well as several vegetarian options.

Jungle Bar Moskkito Vacadiez. An excellent Peruvian-run bar which caters superbly to the adventured-out backpacker. Chatty owner Rómulo offers beer, cocktails, pool, darts, cable TV, an immense CD collection and T-shirt store, all set in a relaxed jungle atmosphere. You can even pay by credit card, and they can sometimes change traveller's cheques.

Monkey Bar/Pizzeria Italia Avaroa, opposite *Hotel Tuichi*. A lot like the *Moskkito Bar* with similarly good cocktails, international music and tasty pizzas. Quite possibly the least Italian-looking pizza place you'll ever see.

Restaurant Heladeria Camila's Av Santa Cruz with Avaroa. Friendly and popular place serving steaks, fish and pizza, as well as good ice cream.

Around Rurrenabaque

Rurrenabaque is the best place in the Bolivian Amazon to organize a trip into the wilderness, either to the **rainforests** of Parque Nacional Madidi and the Reserva de Biosfera y Territorio Indígena Pilon Lajas, or into the **pampas** along the Río Yacuma to the north. Deciding which region to visit is tricky, and ideally it's worth visiting both types of terrain. The rainforest comprises by far the richest ecosystem and is undoubtedly more spectacular: few experiences can compare to travelling by motorized canoe up the fast-flowing rivers of the upper Amazon or walking under the emerald vault of the forest canopy, or flying through the canopy on a zip line (see box below). But, though abundant, rainforest wildlife can be elusive, and to see larger animals requires patience, time and a little luck. The pampas, by contrast, are much less scenic, but in the dry season are a much easier place to see animals, particularly cayman, capybaras and pink river dolphins.

A growing number of **tour agencies** in Rurrenabaque offer trips to the rainforest and the pampas, generally lasting three nights – this is long enough to see the pampas properly, though to really appreciate the rainforest it's worth taking a longer trip. The tour agencies listed in the box below all have good reputations and offer pretty similar packages, but standards vary over time and guides move between different operators – the best way to choose an agency is to talk to other travellers returning from trips, or have a look at the message board in the tourist information office. It's also worth discussing the details before you sign up so you know exactly what you should be getting. Most guides only speak Spanish, but agencies can usually arrange an English-speaking interpreter for larger groups. **Security** is also an issue. Several sexual assaults on travellers by a guide working with one of the major companies not listed below have been reported and, though the culprit is said to have been jailed, you should still be careful and avoid going on a trip alone or with freelance guides who don't hold an official licence issued by the municipal authorities. A plan to standardize tour agencies is being set up, through which operators who achieve certain standards in safety, environmental awareness, sustainable tourism and socio-cultural sensitivity will be awarded with a certificate.

Tour agencies in Rurrenabaque

Amazonica Next to the *Hotel Tuichi* on Avaroa. Run by the same family as the Fluvial agency (see below), and offering pretty much the same tours.

Bala Tours Av Santa Cruz with Comercio ⓣ03/8922527. Specializes in longer tours into Parque Nacional Madidi.

Bolivia Mística ⓣ03/8922169, ⓔmail@boliviamistica.com. The only company to offer twice-daily tours (at 8am and 1.30pm) on a series of zip lines allowing you to whizz through the upper canopy of the trees along 1200m of cable across nine platforms. The professional and safety-conscious guides are also very knowledgeable on surrounding flora and fauna. The cost is $25 a day (though bring a tip for the guides), a percentage of which goes towards a local Tacana community.

Flecha Corner of Avaroa and Santa Cruz ⓣ03/8922476. Popular agency offering standard three- to four-day tours of the pampas and rainforest, as well as longer trips into Parque Nacional Madidi.

Fluvial Next to the *Hotel Tuichi* on Avaroa ⓣ03/8922372, ⓔfluvialtours@hotmail.com. The oldest tour operator in Rurrenabaque, with experienced guides and frequent departures to the pampas and selva. The owner, Tico Tudela, was the man who helped find Yossi Ginsberg (see p.374).

▲ Indigenous child dancing in the Madidi

Parque Nacional Madidi

Covering nearly 19,000 square kilometres, **Parque Nacional Madidi** is home to some of the more diverse plant and animal life in South America. In altitude it ranges from less than 300m to over 5500m above sea level, encompassing a variety of Andean and Amazonian ecosystems which ranges from dense tropical rainforests and seasonally flooded savannas to pristine cloudforest and glacial mountain peaks. Virtually undisturbed by permanent human settlement, the park is home to an astonishing variety of wildlife: more than 700 species of animal have been recorded, along with 620 species of bird, although the total may be more like 1000 – more than in the whole of North America; there are also more than 5000 species of flowering plant. Madidi was recognized as a national park in 1995 and, together with the neighbouring Pilon Lajas reserve and Parque Nacional Tambopata-Candamo across the border in Peru, forms a corridor of biodiversity that is generally considered to be one of the 25 most critical conservation areas in the world.

The establishment of the national park was bitterly contested by local **logging** companies, and much of the area was illegally stripped of mahogany before demarcation. As well as the direct damage they continue to cause, loggers usually hunt for their supper, with devastating consequences for wildlife; animal populations in the more accessible areas are just beginning to recover.

The real wonder of the park is its spectacular scenery and the bewildering complexity of the rainforest ecosystem, and you should treat viewing **wildlife** as a bonus rather than the main purpose of a visit to the park. Having said that, on a standard three- or four-day trip you should see a fair amount of wildlife, including several species of monkey, capybaras, cayman and a kaleidoscopic variety of birds, including brightly coloured toucans, macaws and parrots. If you're lucky you may also see larger animals like the mighty jaguar or the lumbering tapir. Be warned, though, that many species are rare, nocturnal and shy, and the areas of the park most easily accessible by river were logged and hunted until a few years ago.

Practicalities

To enter the Park Nacional Madidi, there is a fee of about $10 (check with your operator if this is included in the price of the tour) to help cover the cost of managing and protecting the park. The park **administration office** is in San Buenaventura, on the opposite bank of the Río Beni from Rurrenabaque. The easiest way to visit Madidi is by taking a tour with an agency from Rurrenabaque. Most run fairly similar trips, travelling up the Río Beni by motorized canoe, camping on the banks of the rivers Tuichi or Hondo, and following trails into the forest. Campsites are pretty basic, with makeshift plastic shelters and mosquito nets, and food (which should be included) is cooked over campfires; the only washing facility is likely to be the river. **Independent travel** to the park is not recommended unless you have plenty of experience of rainforest survival techniques, and even then shouldn't be undertaken lightly – Rurrenabaque's tourist boom was in part inspired by the adventures of **Yossi Ginsberg**, an Israeli traveller who in 1981 tried to reach Rurrenabaque independently from the highlands with his two companions, trekking down through what's now Parque Nacional Madidi. Lost in the forest and running out of food, the group split up. Ginsberg continued and eventually reached the Río Tuichi, where he was rescued and taken to Rurrenabaque. His two companions were never seen again. Ginsberg's account of the ill-fated expedition, *Back from Tuichi*, became a bestseller in Israel, inspiring many Israeli backpackers to visit the region, while his rescuer founded Rurrenabaque's first rainforest tour company. Local people also talk fondly of a Norwegian adventurer, Lars, who disappeared into the rainforest when he went off in search of a lost tribe and has not been seen since.

If you want to get into the park's really pristine areas you'll need to go on a trip of about a week, travelling on foot or horseback into the more remote regions of the forest around the headwaters of the Río Madidi. Extended trips can be arranged through some of the tour agencies in Rurrenabaque – the daily rate should be less or about the same as for shorter trips – though if you don't already have a group formed it may take some time to get one together.

The upper regions of the park can only be reached from the highlands north of La Paz, and even from there they are pretty much inaccessible unless you organize a serious expedition.

Reserva de Biosfera y Territorio Indígena Pilon Lajas

Just south of Rurrenabaque, some four thousand square kilometres of rainforest between the Río Beni and the road south to La Paz are now protected by the **Reserva de Biosfera y Territorio Indígena Pilon Lajas**. Though threatened by loggers and migrant settlers along the road that marks its eastern boundary, the rainforests of Pilon Lajas, like those of Parque Nacional Madidi, are exceptionally biodiverse and survive in a largely pristine state. Declared a Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO in 1977, the reserve protects 642 species of flora, 499 species of bird and 170 species of fish. Pilon Lajas is also home to a small population of indigenous Mosetén, T'simane and Tacana communities, spread out along the length the Río Quiquibey, which runs through the centre of the reserve.

Ecotourism in Rurrenabaque

The alternative to an agency tour is to stay at one of the community-based projects that have sprung up in the area, many in the wake of the internationally renowned Chalalan lodge. **Ecotourism** has become a word in Rurre that is often used in connection with practices that are rather dubiously eco-friendly. However, it must be said that many tour operators have not had the luxury of international financing and expertise in terms of both tourism and environmental awareness. The projects listed below are excellent examples of where sustainable tourism has triumphed over logging and hunting as a way of preserving community life.

The **Albergue Ecologico Chalalán** is a beautiful ecolodge in the heart of the park beside the Río Tuichi, four to five hours by boat from Rurrenabaque. Chalalán was established with support from international conservation groups in a bid to demonstrate how rainforest conservation can provide sustainable livelihoods for local people who might otherwise turn to logging or other destructive activities. It is owned and managed by the Quechua-Tacana community of **San José de Uchupiamonas**, located 25km further up the Tuichi, and the only settlement of any size inside the park. The project is now run entirely by the community. The lodge overlooks a large lake, teeming with cayman and all manner of water birds (a boat trip with a guide is included in the price of your accommodation), and the surrounding forest is covered by a 25-kilometre network of **trails** which you can explore with local guides from San José. Most guides speak a little English, and all are knowledgeable about the forest in the way that only those who grew up in it can be, highlighting the many plant species that can be used for food, medicine or building materials.

Accommodation at Chalalán is in comfortable thatched wooden cabins built in a traditional Tacana style, with mosquito netting, comfortable beds and solar-powered lighting, and shared, or private, bathrooms. A four-day stay including transport to and from Rurrenabaque costs about $280 per person. The lodge has an office in Rurrenabaque (Ⓣ03/8922419, Ⓦwww.chalalan.com) on Comercio street, or you can book through various agencies, including America Tours in La Paz (see p.114).

Only half an hour down the river from Rurre is another ecotourist destination, **San Miguel del Bala** (Ⓣ03/8922394, Ⓔreservas@sanmigueldelbala.com), the perfect place to experience a taste of a traditional **Tacana community**, particularly if you're short on time. You can visit for a day, though there is easily enough to keep you entertained for longer. The cabins all have private bathrooms and are spacious and comfy, with excellent food served in the communal dining area. Partly due to the site's proximity to Rurre, the chances of seeing animals are slimmer than at Chalalán. However, here you can actually visit the community where you are able to see and experience **traditional practices**, like weaving Jataca leaves. There are a number of trails leading out from the cabins, one of which follows a series of animal traps. The guides are all from the community and have many interesting tales of the superstitions and folklore of the forest. A longer walk along the trails leads to a beautiful, winding canyon where you can swim and take in the scenery. Book through the Rurre office, which is located on Comercio between Vaca Diez and Santa Cruz. An all-inclusive trip will cost about $60 a day.

The **Albergue Ecologico Mapajo**, on the Río Quiquibey within the **Reserva de Biosfera y Territorio Indígena Pilon Lajas**, is three hours by motorized canoe from Rurrenabaque. This lodge was established at a fraction of the cost of Chalalán and with a greater degree of community autonomy – the lodge is administered by Mapajo Ecoturismo Indigena, a company wholly

The mysterious Colonel Fawcett

The forests of the Bolivian Amazon have long attracted adventurers, eccentrics and explorers, but few have matched the exploits of **Colonel Percy Harrison Fawcett**. An officer in the British Indian Army, Fawcett first came to Bolivia in 1906 to survey the unmarked and largely unexplored wilderness frontiers between Bolivia and Peru and Brazil. Over the next nineteen years, he travelled the length and breadth of the Beni, keeping a diary in which he painted a vivid picture of life in the Amazon at the peak of the rubber boom. This was a time when "slavery, vice and bloodshed ruled supreme on the rivers", and during which the indigenous inhabitants – considered "wild and hostile savages" – were "as a rule . . . either shot on sight like dangerous animals or ruthlessly hunted down to be sent as slaves to rubber estates". Meanwhile, in the region's few towns and settlements, a motley cast of renegade Europeans existed "surrounded by brutality and bestial passions, living in unbelievable squalor, isolated by vast distances and impassable swamps". Colonel Fawcett's gift for hyperbole was matched by a penchant for exaggeration. His own adventures involved frequent close encounters with twenty-metre-long anacondas, ferocious cannibal tribes, virulent tropical diseases and brutal and corrupt officials. On one occasion he and a small exploration party found their canoe marooned on a sandbar in the Río Heath and surrounded by heavily armed Guarayos warriors. Realizing that to fight would be hopeless, Fawcett says he ordered his companions to sing, accompanied by an accordion. After a few verses of "A Bicycle Made for Two", the previously hostile tribesmen were completely pacified.

In other respects a typical product of the British Empire, the longer Fawcett spent in the Amazon, the more he came to love the wilderness and sympathize with its inhabitants. Over the years he became convinced that somewhere hidden deep in the forest stood a magnificent city inhabited by an ancient and highly advanced race of white Indians. Condemned by many of his contemporaries as a mystic and dreamer, in 1925 he set off to find this mythical city in the wilds of the Brazilian Amazon, and was never seen again. Since then, several expeditions have gone in search of the colonel, while rumours concerning his possible end abound – some say he was eaten by cannibals, others that he found his lost city and stayed there, fathering his own tribe of white Indians. The truth behind his disappearance has never been established, however, and his own fate has now become the kind of mystery that so entranced him when he was alive.

owned by the indigenous communities of the Río Quiquibey. A two- to four-day visit to the lodge offers excellent opportunities for exploring the rainforest and spotting wildlife, as well as the chance to visit the local indigenous communities and see at first hand their unique lifestyle, and the skills that enable them to survive in the rainforest.

With a beautiful setting on a high bluff overlooking the river, the lodge features six comfortable cabins (one of which is a family cabin built for six) built in traditional indigenous style, with the added luxury of mosquito-screening, balconies with hammocks, and shared bathrooms and showers; there's also an interpretation centre with books and other information. Deeper in the forest are some more rustic **campsites** where you can stay overnight on longer excursions. Inclusive visits to Mapajo with accommodation, food, transport, boat excursions, guided walks and visits to indigenous communities can be arranged through the Mapajo Ecoturismo Indígena office in Rurrenabaque on Calle Santa Cruz (Ⓣ03/8922317, Ⓦwww.mapajo.com, Ⓔmapajo@mapajo.com). A three-night trip for two to three people will cost about $240 each.

Pampas del Yacuma

Northeast of Rurrenabaque, the dense forests of the Andean foothills quickly give way to the **pampas**: the vast, swampy grasslands that dominate much of the Beni. Though they have been grazed by cattle for hundreds of years, the pampas still support a great deal of wildlife, particularly along the forested banks of the great rivers that meander across them. Tours with the agencies listed in the box on p.372 head into the pampas by motorized canoe along the Río Yacuma from **Santa Rosa**, a small cattle-ranching town about four hours north on the road to Riberalta and Guayaramerín. In the rainy season, the Yacuma bursts its banks and floods great expanses of the surrounding grasslands, causing wildlife to become more dispersed, but in the dry season it's reduced to a narrow river which attracts an amazing abundance of fauna. Sinister black-and-white **cayman** – some over 2m long – lounge on the muddy banks, slipping quietly into the water as you pass; turtles queue up to sun themselves on logs protruding from the water; groups of **capybara**, the world's largest rodent, watch with apparent indifference as canoes pass right in front of their noses. Most spectacular of all, though, are the **pink freshwater dolphins**, known as *bufeos*, that fish and play in the wide bends of the river. All the wildlife seems largely unconcerned by the passage of motorized canoes, even though the river can get pretty crowded with tour groups. In addition, all manner of **birds** live on the banks of the river, including herons, three different species of kingfisher, elegant roseate spoonbills, massive storks and the clumsy hoatzin.

Away from the river, the pampas themselves are not that impressive: a great expanse of swamp and tangled cattle pasture with the occasional lake where your guide will inevitably try to find an anaconda – these can allegedly grow to lengths of up to 10m and have been known to attack and swallow whole calves and even people. Trudging through a mosquito-infested swamp searching for reptiles isn't everyone's idea of fun, but a trip to the pampas is worth it just for the amount of wildlife you will see on the river. The agencies all have makeshift camps of varying quality along the river, usually with plastic shelters and mosquito nets. In the rainy season (roughly Nov–April) the whole area is flooded and wildlife becomes much more dispersed, while the ferocious mosquitoes offer an additional disincentive, though you can always find someone willing to take you if you're still keen.

Riberalta and around

Now a remote economic backwater, just over a hundred years ago Bolivia's **northern Amazon** frontier was one of the most commercially desirable stretches of territory on earth. The region supports some of the richest natural rubber forests in the whole of the Amazon, and in the late nineteenth century a surge in international demand for rubber generated an unprecedented economic boom. Great fortunes were made by the so-called "rubber barons" who controlled production, but for the indigenous peoples of the Amazon the rubber boom was an unmitigated disaster. They were recruited by force to work in the collection of wild rubber under conditions of appalling brutality, and their population declined catastrophically. Little of the money made was reinvested, and when the boom ended in the early twentieth century with the establishment of rubber plantations in Asia, the region slipped back into the economic torpor which characterizes it today, with collection of wild Brazil nuts – known as *castañas* – the main export industry.

From Rurrenabaque a dirt road continues north across a wide savanna-covered plain towards the Brazilian frontier, more than 500km away. After the cattle-ranching towns of **Reyes** and **Santa Rosa**, settlements are few and far between. The road passes through a sparsely populated and virtually untamed landscape of seasonally flooded grassland dotted with patches of forest and interspersed with swamps. As the road draws near to **Riberalta**, the biggest city in the northern frontier region, the savanna gradually gives way to dense Amazonian rainforest, a carpet of green that stretches almost unbroken across Brazil to the Atlantic Ocean. Riberalta itself is the communications hub of the frontier region, a river port at the confluence of the Beni and Madre de Dios rivers – it's at least twelve hours by road from Rurrenabaque when conditions are good in the dry season. East of Riberalta the road continues 100km to the town of **Guayaramerín**, on the banks of the Río Mamoré, which is the main border crossing point if you're heading north into Brazil (see p.381). Just north of Guayaramerín, the settlement of **Cachuela Esperanza** provides a reminder of the wealth and importance this remote region once enjoyed: formerly the headquarters of the biggest of all the Bolivian rubber barons, it's now a semi-abandoned ruin all but swallowed by the forest.

Riberalta

Set on a bluff above a great sweep of the Río Madre de Dios just after its silt-laden waters are joined by those of the Beni, **RIBERALTA** is the second-biggest town in the Amazon lowlands, with a population of about 40,000, largely employed in the processing and export of Brazil nuts. Riberalta's economic fortunes never really recovered from the collapse of the rubber boom, and it now has the sleepy feel of a place basking in the memory of past glories – most people like nothing better than to escape the heat of the day by whiling away the hours in a hammock. There's no great reason to stop unless you're heading for Cobija (see p.383) and want to break your journey.

The centre of town is the pleasant, tree-lined **Plaza Principal**, surrounded by cafés and ice-cream parlours that are a good place to sit out the heat with a cold drink. Otherwise, it's worth walking down to the riverfront Parque Costanera, where the first and last steamboat to navigate the rivers of the Bolivian Amazon, the *Tahuamanu*, stands mounted in concrete as a monument.

Built in Scotland, it entered service in 1899 in time to see action in the Acre War with Brazil.

Another possibility is trying to get a tour around one of the eighteen **brazil nut** factories; **Beneficiadora Manutata**, on Simón Bolívar with Trinidad, and the **Beneficiadora Vargas**, on Avenida Wilfredo Barba with Avenida Fuerza Naval, are both worth a try.

Practicalities

Buses arrive and depart from the offices of various transport companies scattered around town. Services from La Paz, Trinidad and Rurrenabaque arrive at Flota Guayara (on the corner of Calle Nicolas Suárez and Avenida Republica de Brasil) or Flota Yungueña (a few blocks further east on Republica de Brasil); buses from Guayaramerín terminate at Flota Guayara; and those from Cobija at Flota Guayara or Trans Pando (on Calle Moreno a block west of Avenida Martinez) – all three companies are close to the centre of town, though you can always flag down one of the many **motorbike taxis**, which charge about $0.50 for short rides. The **airport** is about ten minutes' walk away from the town centre along Avenida Ochoa. LAB (if it is back in service; see p.30 for more information) and AeroSur both have regular flights to La Paz, Santa Cruz and other towns in the Beni. The Amaszonas office is on Chuquisaca with Sucre (☎03/8523933), and you can call TAM on ☎03/8522646. The completion of the road from La Paz has reduced Riberalta's importance as a river port, but you can still find occasional **boats** heading up the Madre de Dios to Puerto Maldonado in Peru: departures are posted on a notice board outside the Capitanía del Puerto office on the riverfront. Boats also travel up the Beni to Rurrenabaque when the road is closed during the rainy season (Nov–March).

The **post office** is on the Plaza Principal and the **ENTEL** office is next door. The Banco Mercantil, also on the plaza, will **change dollars** but not traveller's cheques, and nowhere in town will advance cash against a credit card. **Motorcycle hire** is available a block south of the plaza on Avenida Nicolas Suárez for about $1.60 an hour: hiring a bike and heading off along any of the tracks running out of town into the hinterlands of the surrounding rainforest is one of the few active ways to pass the time here.

The best **place to stay** is the *Hotel Colonial* (☎03/8523018; ③), just off the plaza on Avenida Placido Mendez 95, which has pleasant rooms set around a cool courtyard garden. The *Hotel Bahia* (☎03/8522606; ③), on the riverfront three blocks east of Calle Nicolas Suárez, is also comfortable and commands great views over the river. The best budget option is the basic but clean *Hotel Lazo* (☎03/8522352; ②), a couple of blocks from the plaza on Calle Nicolas Salvatierra, which has cheaper rooms with shared bathrooms. The *Residencial El Pauro* (☎03/8522452; ②–③), on the same street a block east of the plaza, is also pretty good, despite its ramshackle exterior. The best-value lodgings are at the welcoming *Residencial Reyes* (☎03/8522615; ②) close to the airport on Avenida Sucre, but it's quite a long way from the centre of town.

There are plenty of **places to eat** on the Plaza Principal: *Restaurante Confitería Horno Camba* serves up decent steaks and river fish. The inevitable *Club Social*, next door, is less popular but also pretty good. There are also a couple of *heladerías* serving ice cream, snacks and juices, and a small pizzeria on the plaza. Just half a block south is *Restaurante Pollo Loco* which serves up tasty chicken dishes. Away from the plaza on the riverfront Parque Costanera, the *Club Social Nautico* serves good Bolivian food and cheap *almuerzos*; you can also cool off in the **swimming pool** for $1.50.

Guayaramerín

Set on the banks of the Río Mamoré some 86km east of Riberalta, **GUAYARAMERÍN** is the main crossing point on Bolivia's northern border with Brazil, a modern and prosperous frontier town with a distinctly Brazilian flavour and a thriving economy based on duty-free sales. Many of the streets are lined with shops and boutiques selling perfume, electronic goods and designer clothes to the thousands of Brazilian bargain-hunters who flock over the border on shopping trips, though the devaluation of the Brazilian currency in the late 1990s has seen this flow decrease substantially. Most people who make it to Guayaramerín only come here to cross the border to or from Brazil, but even if you're just passing through, a trip out to the semi-abandoned rubber settlement at **Cachuela Esperanza** is a worthwhile diversion.

Practicalities

Buses from Riberalta and beyond arrive at the Terminal de Buses, about 3km from the centre of town along Calle Beni: a **motorbike taxi** from here should cost about $0.50. Everything you might need is concentrated around the Plaza Principal, a few blocks south of the river. The **airport** is just four blocks east of the plaza along Calle 25 de Mayo. For ticket sales, the TAM office is on Calle 16 de Julio, and Amaszonas on Avenida Federico Román. You can **hire motorcycles** for $1.80 an hour on the plaza – essential if you want to head out to Cachuela Esperanza.

The *Hotel San Carlos*, a block north and east from the Plaza on Avenida 6 de Agosto, changes **traveller's cheques** – the only place in town that does – and

The railway to nowhere

Guayaramerín is the last navigable point on the **Río Mamoré**, the most important waterway in the Bolivian Amazon. Downstream from Guayaramerín a series of nineteen cataracts and rapids, stretching for over 400km down the ríos Mamoré and Madeira, cuts off the Bolivian river network from Brazil and access to the Atlantic Ocean. During the rubber boom, Bolivians and foreign speculators dreamed of bypassing these rapids and opening up the Bolivian Amazon to trade with the world. In 1872 the US journalist and speculator **George Church** formed a company to build a railway circumventing the rapids. The crews sent to begin the work met with immediate disaster, however. Their boats sank, and ravaged by fever and Indian attacks the workforce abandoned their equipment and fled through the forest. Church's company went bankrupt and the contractors concluded that the region was "a welter of putrefaction where men die like flies. Even with all the money in the world and half its population it is impossible to finish this railway."

Church himself was undeterred, and by 1878 had raised enough financial support to launch another attempt, with equally disastrous consequences. By the time the project was abandoned three years later, five hundred workers had died but only 6km of track had been laid. But the dream of a railway around the rapids would not die. In 1903 Brazil promised to complete the project in compensation for the annexation of the Acre territory from Bolivia. Work began again in 1908, and three years later the Madeira–Mamoré Railway – or the **Devil's Railway**, as it had become known – was finally completed. More than six thousand workers are thought to have died in its construction, a sacrifice that was quickly shown to have been made in vain, since the railway opened for business just as the Amazon rubber boom collapsed. The Brazilian government kept it running until 1972, when it was finally abandoned, its rusting rails, swallowed by encroaching jungle, providing an eloquent testimony to a failed dream of progress in the Amazon.

also changes dollars and Brazilian *reais*. You can also change cash at the Casa de Cambio on the plaza or with the many street-changers around the port. There are no ATMs in town, but many shops accept credit cards and you may be able to persuade them to give you a cash advance, though don't count on it. The **post office** is on Calle Oruro, three blocks south of the plaza. The **ENTEL** office is on Calle Mamoré, near the corner with Calle Oruro, two blocks north of the plaza.

There are several good **accommodation** options in town. The cheapest is the *Hotel Central* (Ⓣ03/8553911; ②) on Avenida Santa Cruz, a block north of the plaza, which has small, basic rooms with shared bathrooms. The *Hotel Litoral* (Ⓣ03/8553895; ②), just east of the plaza on Avenida 25 de Mayo, is a bit more spacious and comfortable. Directly opposite is the similar *Hotel Santa Ana* (Ⓣ03/8553900; ②), with a cool courtyard garden. The most upmarket place is the plush *Hotel San Carlos*, a block north and east from the Plaza on Avenida 6 de Agosto (Ⓣ03/8553555 or 8552419; ⑤), which has comfortable, air-conditioned rooms and caters mainly to business people. The best **places to eat** are on and around the plaza; the two *heladerías* are good for ice cream, coffee, juices and snacks. The *Club Social* serves reasonably good *almuerzos* and the Beni staples of steak and river fish, while the *Restaurant Karla Breta*, on Calle Federico Roman, serves fairly good Brazilian food and is popular with Brazilian day-trippers.

Crossing the Brazilian border: Guajará-Mirim

From the port at the bottom of Avenida Federico Roman, regular passenger **boats** (every 15min; $1; $1.40 to return) make the ten-minute crossing to **Guajará-Mirim** in Brazil. The Bolivian **migración** (Mon–Fri 8am–4pm, Sat 8am–noon) is to the right of the port as you face the river: you should get an exit stamp here if you're continuing into Brazil but it's not necessary if you're just making a day-trip across the river. If you need a visa, the **Brazilian Consulate** (Mon–Fri 9am–1pm, 3–5pm) is on the corner of calles Beni and 24 de Septiembre, a block east of the plaza. Note that to enter Brazil here you need to have an international certificate of **yellow fever vaccination**; if you don't, there's a clinic beside the immigration office in Guajará-Mirim where you can get vaccinated. From Guajará-Mirim there are frequent buses to Puerto Velho, from where there are connections to other destinations in Brazil.

Cachuela Esperanza

From Guayaramerín a rough dirt road runs 42km northwest to the small town of **CACHUELA ESPERANZA**. Founded in the heart of the wilderness in 1882, Cachuela Esperanza was once the headquarters of **Nicolás Suárez** (see box, p.382) and the most advanced town in the Bolivian Amazon, with modern offices and homes, state-of-the-art medical facilities, a theatre which attracted international stars, its own narrow-gauge railway and a network of roads to accommodate Suárez's fleet of imported limousines. Today Cachuela Esperanza is a dilapidated ghost town, all but swallowed by the encroaching vegetation, but though little remains of the once thriving settlement, there's still enough here to give you an idea of what the place was like in its heyday, and as a monument to failed dreams of progress it has few equals.

The Town

With a spectacular setting overlooking a broad sweep of the Río Madre de Dios, Cachuela Esperanza is nowadays a sleepy little backwater with a population of just a few hundred, but enough buildings remain to give an idea of its former

Nicolás Suárez: rubber baron

At the peak of his powers, **Nicolás Suárez** was the absolute ruler over more than six million hectares of rainforest where rubber was collected by a massive workforce of Caripuña Indians who were slaves in all but name. He also controlled the rapids that separated the Bolivian river system from the Amazon proper (charging huge tolls for the transport of cargo around them) and even raised a private army to fight the separatist rebellion of Brazilian settlers in the northern territory of Acre in 1899. With the annexation of Acre by Brazil, however, he lost many of his rubber holdings, and after the collapse of the rubber boom a few years later his empire gradually disintegrated. He died in Cachuela Esperanza in 1940, and though virtually forgotten elsewhere in Bolivia, in the Beni and Pando he is still revered by some as a heroic pioneer who brought progress and civilization to the wilderness. Ironically, decades later his great-nephew, **Roberto Suárez**, came to control a similarly powerful empire based on the export of another Amazonian product for which the industrialized world had developed an insatiable appetite – cocaine – amassing in the process a personal fortune so vast that in the 1980s he reputedly offered to pay off Bolivia's entire national debt.

grandeur. Though run-down, the sturdy wooden and brick houses built in the early twentieth century are as well put together as anything you'll see in the region today, and are in remarkably good condition given their age and the ravages of heat and humidity – they were built from Canadian pine which was specially imported for its resistance to the insects that otherwise devour wooden structures in the Amazon. Some are now deserted, but others still serve as homes to the few people who continue to live here.

Coming into town along the road from Guayaramerín you pass a small **wooden church** built in 1909 that would look more at home in New England than here in the Amazon. Close by stands the modest stone **tomb of Suárez**, with an inscription praising him as a "heroic patriot and eminent industrial progressive". Just beyond the church on your left is the well-preserved **cinema-theatre**, built in the 1930s to entertain Suárez and his army of foreign technicians. On the riverfront a **bust of Suárez** looks out over a fierce set of rapids known as Hell's Cauldron, the first in the series of riverine obstacles that effectively cuts Bolivia off from the Amazon mainstream; close by to the right a broken **monument** commemorates the men who died trying to negotiate these rapids, while along to the left stands a small **steam locomotive** that served the railway Suárez built to circumvent them. Suárez's mansion, known as **Villa Luta** – the "House of Mourning" – occupies the highest point in town, a crumbling shell overgrown with vegetation.

Practicalities

On most days a **truck** runs to Cachuela Esperanza – ask a motorbike taxi to take you to the *paradero* (truck stop) on the edge of town to catch it – but it's difficult to get there and back on the same day this way. The best plan is to hire a **motorbike**: it's an easy one-hour ride. As this is a border area, you're supposed to carry your passport, and there's a police roadblock on the way out of Guayaramerín where you'll have to register. If you've hired a motorbike and left your passport as a deposit, be sure to bring a photocopy with you. You can stay overnight in Cachuela Esperanza at the pleasant *Hotel Esperanza* (☎03/8552201; ⑤), which occupies a restored old building on the riverfront. There are some good **swimming** spots along the river just outside town: the local children can show you where they are.

Cobija and the Pando

The northwestern-most tip of the Bolivia is covered by the department of **Pando**, a remote and sparsely populated rainforest region where logging and the collection of wild rubber and Brazil nuts are the main economic activities. Until recently the Pando was accessible only by boat along the Madre de Dios, Tahuamanu and Orthon rivers, which flow into the region from Peru, but now a rough road cut through the rainforest runs from just south of Riberalta to **Cobija**, the departmental capital, on the Brazilian border. The exciting and unpredictable journey along this road takes you through exuberant rainforest broken only by occasional settlements where the first signs of forest clearance can be seen, with blackened stumps of trees protruding like broken teeth from pale green pasture and scrubby secondary growth. The journey also involves three major river crossings by ferry and takes at least twelve hours when the road is in good condition; in the rainy season (Nov–March) it's often completely impassable.

The forests of this wild frontier region are hotly disputed. The businessmen who control the collection of rubber and Brazil nuts, some of whom are descended from the nineteenth-century rubber barons, claim ownership rights over some 30,000 square kilometres of forest – nearly half the department. But these claims are contested by the indigenous and campesino communities who collect the nuts and rubber – often working under a system of permanent debt so severe it amounts to a disguised form of slavery. These communities are now using land-rights legislation to demand that the forest be recognized as theirs. To complicate things further, a large area of forest has been covered by the **Reserva Nacional Amazónica Manuripi Heath** (since 1973) which, on paper at least, has severely restricted the activities of the logging companies. Though it has almost no infrastructure as yet, this reserve can now be visited from Cobija.

The Bolivian government has invested a lot of money in the Pando, building infrastructure to encourage economic development and attract settlers from other parts of Bolivia. This policy is in part aimed at establishing a human frontier to prevent a repeat of what happened across the border in the Brazilian State of Acre (see p.353 & p.390).

Cobija

With a population of just 15,000, **COBIJA** is the smallest departmental capital in Bolivia, an isolated border town with a distinctly Brazilian flavour. Founded in the early twentieth century as a rubber collection centre, the town's economic fortunes now depend more on duty-free sales to Brazil and central government investment in infrastructure. Most of the streets are well paved and the town boasts a modern airport out of all proportion to its needs, but for all that it retains the indolent charm of a half-forgotten tropical outpost. With few obvious attractions and the highest rainfall in Bolivia, it's no surprise that few travellers make it here. But if you do, it does offer an adventurous back route into Brazil and even Peru, and the chance to explore a rainforest region where organized tourism has yet to make an impact. Note that, because of its isolation, everything in Cobija is more expensive than elsewhere in the Bolivian Amazon.

Built on hilly ground, the town has an irregular street layout rather than the conventional grid plan of most Bolivian cities. The town's busiest area is around the **central plaza**, close to the **Río Acre**, which forms the border with Brazil.

From the plaza the main thoroughfare, **Calle 9 de Febrero**, heads east towards the airport and an intersection with Avenida Internacional, which runs across the river into Brazil.

Practicalities

Buses from Riberalta and beyond arrive at the offices of the three transport companies, Trans Pando, Flota Guayara and Flota Yungueña, all of which are on Calle 9 de Febrero. If you're arriving from Brazil and heading overland into Bolivia, you'll have to go first to Riberalta and then get another bus from there, unless you can face the direct bus with Yungueña to La Paz every Sunday, a harrowing 72-hour journey. The modern **airport**, served by Amaszonas and TAM flights from La Paz, Santa Cruz and Trinidad (often via Riberalta and Guayaramerín), is on the outskirts of town to the southeast: a taxi from here to the centre should cost around $2. The **post office** is on the plaza, while the **ENTEL** office is a couple of blocks away on Calle Sucre. There's **Internet** access (Mon–Fri 8am–10pm, Sat & Sun 8am–noon; $1.20 per hour) in the small university building, a block south of the plaza on Calle Cornejo.

There are several **places to stay** in Cobija, though all are relatively expensive compared to elsewhere in the Amazon. The best budget option is the small, basic *Residencial Cobija* (☎03/8422375; ②), a block away from the plaza on Calle Ayacucho. The *Residencial Frontera* (☎03/8422740; ②), a few doors down, is similar but a bit overpriced; alternatively, try the friendly, family-run *Residencial Cocodrilo* (☎03/8422215; ③), around the corner on Avenida Molina – both also have cheaper rooms with shared bathroom. The only decent upmarket option is the *Hotel Avenida* (☎03/8422108; ③), on the way out to the airport on Calle 9 de Febrero, which is clean and comfortable, and also has more expensive rooms with air-conditioning.

For a small, remote town, Cobija has some good **places to eat**. The most popular is *El Rincón de la Abuela*, a block away from the plaza on Avenida Molina, which has excellent meat and fish dishes. *Chifa Hong Kong*, opposite, serves reasonable Chinese food, while *El Mesón de la Pascana*, on Calle Ayacucho, offers moderately priced Altiplano favourites like *sajta*. For good breakfasts, strong coffee and delicious Brazilian cakes and pastries try *Panaderia y Confiteria Cobija*, two blocks from the plaza just off Cornejo. *Heladeria Nishi*, on the plaza, is good for ice cream, ice-cold fruit juices and ferocious Brazilian *caipirinhas*.

Crossing the Brazilian border: Brasiléia

The Bolivian **immigration office** (open daily 24hr) is on the main border crossing, the international bridge over the Río Acre at the end of Avenida Internacional. A **taxi** from the town centre across the bridge to the federal police office (where you'll need to clear immigration) in the Brazilian town of **Brasiléia** should cost about $4; otherwise it's a twenty-minute walk. You need an international yellow-fever vaccination certificate to enter Brazil here. If you need a visa, the **Brazilian Consulate** (Mon–Fri 8am–1pm) is just off the plaza on Calle Ayacucho. From Brasiléia there are regular buses to **Río Branco**, from where you can get onward connections.

There's also an adventurous route into the Peruvian department of **Madre de Dios** from here. From Brasiléia you can get a bus to Asis Brazil, 95km west on the border with Peru, and cross over to the Peruvian settlement of Iñapari, from where a marginal road heads south to Puerto Maldonado, served by occasional trucks. Alternatively, light aircraft connect Iñapari with Puerto Maldonado when the road is closed. Puerto Maldonado is linked by road and regular flights to Cuzco.

Reserva Nacional Amazónica Manuripi Heath

South of Cobija between the ríos Tahuamanu and Madre de Dios, some 8500 square km of lowland Amazon rainforest are now protected, at least on paper, as the **Reserva Nacional Amazónica Manuripi Heath**. There's no real tourist infrastructure in the reserve, so you'll need to take all your own food and bedding, but you can get there by truck and stay with the park guards in **San Silvestre**, a small settlement on the Río Manuripi south of Cobija. There are plenty of trails through the rainforest from here which are used by the *castañeros* during the Brazil nut-collecting season (Nov–Feb), and the guards also have canoes with which they patrol the river in search of illegal loggers.

Visiting the park is an adventurous trip through a wilderness area that is also frequently used to smuggle cocaine from Peru to Brazil, recommended only for the experienced and adventurous traveller. Before setting off you need authorization from the **park office** (☎03/8423399) in Cobija, which is on a side street near the football stadium on Calle 9 de Febrero: take the first right after the stadium as you head east, then second left. The staff there will let the park guards know you're coming, and may be able to help you find transport. Trucks head down to San Silvestre (3–4hr; $6) several times a week. From San Silvestre, irregular trucks continue south along the road through the reserve to Chivé on the Río Madre de Dios, where you may be able to catch a lift on a boat heading upstream into Peru or downstream to Riberalta.

Travel details

Buses

Times given are for good road conditions during the dry season; journeys can take twice as long or more after rain, if they're possible at all.

Cobija to: La Paz (1 weekly; 48hr); Riberalta (1–2 daily; 12hr).

Guayaramerín to: La Paz (4–5 weekly; 32hr); Riberalta (6 daily; 2hr); Trinidad (1–2 daily; 30hr).

La Paz to: Cobija (1 weekly; 2 days); Guayaramerín (4–5 weekly; 32hr); Riberalta (1–2 daily; 30hr); Rurrenabaque (1–2 daily; 20hr); San Borja (1 daily; 20hr).

Riberalta to: Cobija (1–2 daily; 12hr); La Paz (1–2 daily; 30hr); Trinidad (5 weekly; 28hr).

Rurrenabaque to: La Paz (1–2 daily; 20hr); Trinidad (4 weekly; 20hr).

San Borja to: La Paz (1 daily; 20hr); Trinidad (daily; 10–12hr); Yucumo (3–4 daily; 2hr).

Santa Cruz to: Trinidad (12 daily; 10–12hr).

San Ignacio de Moxos to: Trinidad (1–2 daily; 3–4hr).

Trinidad to: Guayaramerín (1–2 daily; 30hr); Rurrenabaque (4 weekly; 20hr); San Borja (daily; 10–12hr); San Ignacio de Moxos (1–2 daily; 3–4hr); Santa Cruz (12 daily; 10–12hr).

Boats

Guayaramerín to: Trinidad (2–3 weekly; 5–8 days).

Puerto Villarroel to: Trinidad (2–3 weekly; 5–7 days).

Trinidad to: Guayaramerín (2–3 weekly; 3–7 days); Puerto Villarroel (2–3 weekly; 7 days).

Planes

Cobija to: La Paz (1–2 daily; 1hr 40min); Santa Cruz (5 weekly; 2hr); Trinidad (3 weekly; 1hr 40min).

Guayaramerín to: La Paz (1–2 daily; 1hr); Santa Cruz (1 daily; 2hr); Trinidad (5 weekly; 1hr).

La Paz to: Cobija (1–2 daily; 1hr 40min); Guayaramerín (1–2 daily; 1hr); Riberalta (1–2 daily; 1hr); Rurrenabaque (5 weekly; 40min); Trinidad (1–3 daily; 1hr).

Riberalta to: La Paz (1–2 daily; 1hr); Santa Cruz (5 weekly; 1hr 30min); Trinidad (5 weekly; 1hr).

Rurrenabaque to: La Paz (5 weekly; 40min).

Santa Cruz to: Cobija (5 weekly; 2hr); Guayaramerín (1 daily; 2hr); Trinidad (1–2 daily; 1hr).

Trinidad to: Cobija (3 weekly; 1hr 40min); Guayaramerín (5 weekly; 1hr); La Paz (1–3 daily; 1hr); Riberalta (5 weekly; 1hr); Santa Cruz (1–2 daily; 1hr).

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History

Bolivia's first inhabitants were descendants of the nomadic hunting groups that migrated into the Americas from Asia during the last Ice Age, between 20,000 and 40,000 years ago. Having crossed the Bering Strait between Siberia and Alaska, when sea levels were lower and a bridge of land and ice linked the two continents, successive generations gradually migrated throughout the Americas, reaching the Andes at least 20,000 years ago, where they lived in semi-nomadic tribes, hunting prehistoric animals like mastodons and giant sloths.

At the end of the Ice Age (around 10,000 years ago) these species became extinct as a result of rapid climate change – though hunting pressure may also have played a part. During the same period, humans began the long, slow transition to an agricultural society based around settled villages, domesticating plants, including maize and potatoes, as well as animals such as llamas and alpacas. By about 2500 BC, agriculture and herding had become the main form of subsistence in the highlands and along the Pacific coast, though in the forested lowlands a semi-nomadic lifestyle combining hunting and fishing with limited cultivation remained the norm. As population density increased and agricultural techniques developed, social organizations gradually grew more complex and governments and ceremonial religious centres began to emerge, along with a specialist class of priests and chiefs. By about 1800 BC, pottery was in widespread use throughout the region, and primitive metal smelting developed soon after – two key technological advances.

Tiwanaku

The first major civilization to develop on the Bolivian Altiplano was the **Tiwanaku** (also spelt Tiahuanaco) culture, centred on the city of the same name which was located on the southern shores of Lago Titicaca. First founded around 1000 BC, by 100 BC Tiwanaku had become an important religious and urban centre with distinct classes of peasants, priests, warriors, artisans and aristocrats, and an economy based on mining, llama and alpaca herding and, above all, the cultivation of potatoes and other crops along the shores of Lago Titicaca, using a sophisticated and highly productive system of raised fields known as **sukakullos** (see p.119). This system produced huge food surpluses, which offered security against poor harvests, freed labour for the construction of monumental religious-ceremonial centres, allowed trade with other societies, and fuelled a dramatic imperial expansion.

From around 700 AD Tiwanaku's influence – as revealed by the presence throughout the region of characteristic pottery and textile styles, decorated with distinctive abstract designs and often featuring serpents and pumas – spread across the Andes, dominating an area comprising much of modern Bolivia, southern Peru, northeast Argentina and northern Chile. Quite how the influence of Tiwanaku culture spread remains unclear: some experts say it was the result of trade and religious influence; others, that it was through conquest, particularly in the later centuries, when the more militaristic regional centre of Wari–Tiwanaku in the southern Peruvian Andes played a greater role in imperial expansion. The truth probably lies somewhere in between: like all Andean societies, Tiwanaku needed access to products from different ecological zones – potatoes, meat and metal from the Altiplano, maize and peppers from the temperate valleys, coca and hardwoods from the tropical lowlands – so that, as its power grew, direct control of other regions through conquest or colonization probably came to replace trade.

At the height of its power, the city of Tiwanaku was a sophisticated urban-ceremonial complex with a population of over 50,000, lying at the centre of a vast empire of colonies and religious centres linked by paved stone roads served by huge llama caravans. Some time after 1000 AD, however, the Tiwanaku empire collapsed as dramatically as it had risen, its population dispersed and its great cities of stone were abandoned and fell into ruin. The reasons for the empire's sudden downfall remain unclear: possible explanations include a cataclysmic earthquake or foreign invasion, though the most likely is climate change – scientists studying ice cores from Andean glaciers have discovered that, from about 1000 AD, the region suffered a long-term decline in rainfall, suggesting that a prolonged drought may have wiped out the intensive agriculture on which Tiwanaku depended.

The Aymara

The Tiwanaku empire was succeeded by a large number of much smaller regional states. The Altiplano around the shores of Lago Titicaca fell under the control of the **Aymara**, who probably migrated to the region from the highlands to the east sometime after the collapse of Tiwanaku. Aymara territory was subdivided into at least seven militaristic kingdoms, of which the **Lupaca** and **Colla** were probably the largest and most powerful. Aymara society was radically different from that of Tiwanaku: they lived in fortified settlements (*pucaras*) some distance from the lakeshore, relied on large-scale llama and alpaca herding rather than intensive cultivation, and followed a much more localized religion, building few ceremonial sites other than the stone tombs (*chulpas*) where important individuals were buried.

The basic unit of Aymara society was the **ayllu** – an extended kinship group, rather like a clan, each of which was divided into two halves – above which were powerful regional nobles, or **kurakas**, who held land independently from the *ayllus* over which they ruled; the *kurakas* were in turn subject to a warrior chief or king. Though centred overwhelmingly on the Altiplano, the Aymara maintained colonies in different ecological regions to ensure access to a wider range of produce: in return for meat, wool and potatoes from the highlands these colonies provided fish and salt from the Pacific coast; maize and other crops from the inter-Andean valleys; and coca, fruit and hardwood from the Yungas. As well as major livestock herders, the Aymara were also important producers of gold and silver, which were found in abundance on the Altiplano, making it one of the wealthiest regions in the Andes.

The Incas

By the mid-fifteenth century the Aymara kingdoms found themselves in growing competition with the **Incas**, an expansionist, Quechua-speaking people with their capital at Cusco in southern Peru. Despite their military power, the Aymara kingdoms proved incapable of uniting against this common threat and were gradually incorporated into the Inca empire. Initially, this was a fairly peaceful process: the Incas left the conquered kingdoms intact and did little to alter Aymara society, contenting themselves with extracting tribute. In 1470, however, the main Aymara kingdoms around Lago Titicaca rose in revolt, prompting the Incas to dispatch a great army from Cusco to crush the rebellion.

Thereafter, the Incas moved swiftly to reinforce their control of the Altiplano, building roads, storehouses and fortresses, and incorporating the region into their domains as the **Collasuyo**, one of the richest and most populous of the empire's four quarters, or *suyus*. The Aymara rulers were permitted to remain in place, though with a limited degree of autonomy; they were also required to send their young nobles to Cusco both to serve as hostages and to be indoctrinated with the imperial Inca ideology. A different system of government was used in the fertile inter-Andean valleys east of the Altiplano, particularly around Cochabamba, where the Incas established military–agricultural colonies of loyal Quechua-speakers, known as **mitamaqs**. These guaranteed Inca control of this rich and temperate region and protected the southeastern frontier of the empire against raids by semi-nomadic peoples from the Eastern Lowlands, whom they never managed to conquer. Broadly speaking, the ethno-linguistic boundaries established in this period survive to this day. The inter-Andean valleys remain largely Quechua-speaking, while Aymara remains dominant in the Altiplano – it's one of the few Andean languages to have survived both Inca and Spanish rule, an indication of the strength and resilience of Aymara identity.

With the conquest of the *Collasuyo* the Incas confirmed their status as the most powerful Andean empire since Tiwanaku, with whom they consciously sought to associate themselves, claiming that their founding ancestor, Manco Capac, had been brought into being on the Isla del Sol in Lago Titicaca, the sacred centre of the Andean world where the sun itself had been created. In the space of a century, the Incas had progressed from being just one of a number of regional groups to becoming masters of the greatest empire yet seen in the Americas – an empire which stretched over five thousand kilometres from southern Colombia to northern Chile, boasted a population of perhaps twenty million, and which was ruled by a god-emperor who claimed direct descent from the sun.

The Inca empire combined authoritarian government with rational and egalitarian social and economic organizations, a unique system that has been described as **theocratic communism**. Though the powerful Inca armies played a key role in the expansion of the empire, many regional groups submitted voluntarily, such were the advantages of Inca rule (and the futility of resistance). Conquered peoples were required to accept the official state religion – which held the sun god Inti to be the supreme deity, and saw the Inca ruler as his direct representative – but beyond that they were allowed to maintain their own religious and cultural practices. Local rulers who surrendered voluntarily were often allowed to remain in place, while the Andean peasantry was left to work the land in return for supplying tribute either in the form of produce (whether food, textiles or other goods) or labour service (*mita*). The enormous food surplus created by this system was stored in a system of imperial warehouses and used to feed standing armies and the ruling Inca elite of priests, administrators and nobles, as well as providing insurance against crop failure and famine for the peasantry themselves. The labour service was used to construct a massive network of roads, to build the monumental palaces and temples that graced Cusco and other major Inca sites, and to construct sophisticated agricultural terracing and irrigation systems that greatly increased food production.

As well as this civil engineering, the genius of the Incas lay in their administrative bureaucracy, which succeeded in controlling the movements of goods and people to an astonishing degree despite having no written language, creating a level of prosperity, wellbeing and security that the people of the Andes have probably never seen matched before or since. Quite how this great empire would have developed, however, will never be known. Within eighty years of their conquest of the Altiplano, the Inca empire was brought to a catastrophic end by a small band of Spaniards led by Francisco Pizarro, who landed on the coast of northern Peru and set about a war of conquest that would change the Andean world forever.

The Spanish conquest

From the Incas' point of view, the arrival of the first conquistadors in 1532 could not have come at a worse time. Just five years before, the empire had been swept by a devastating epidemic – probably smallpox, introduced from Europe by the Spaniards, which had worked its way down overland from Mexico. Among the innumerable victims – almost a third of the population are thought to have died – had been the ruling Inca, **Huayna Capac**. Huayna Capac left his empire divided between two of his sons: his favourite, **Atahualpa**, who had established himself at Quito in the empire's far north, where he commanded the armies that had recently conquered what is now Ecuador, and **Huascar**, the legitimate heir to the throne, who was based in the capital at Cusco. A bloody civil war broke out between the two, from which Atahualpa emerged victorious.

Atahualpa retired to the thermal baths at Cajamarca in northern Peru to savour his victory. It was here that messengers brought him news of the arrival of strange bearded foreigners on the coast nearby. At the first decisive encounter between the two, Pizarro and his 170 followers kidnapped Atahualpa and massacred thousands of his men, demonstrating for the first time their overwhelming military superiority: mounted on horseback (an animal never previously seen in South America), with steel weapons and armour, and backed by terrifying cannons, the Spanish conquistadors were virtually invincible, and even small bands proved capable of defeating massive indigenous armies. Atahualpa was ransomed for a fabulous hoard of gold and silver and then treacherously killed, though not before sending orders for Huascar to be executed. Huascar's faction in Cusco initially welcomed the Spaniards, if not quite as liberators then at least as useful mercenaries who had defeated their enemy just as all seemed lost. With large areas of the Inca empire only recently conquered and not yet fully assimilated, the Spaniards also found indigenous allies amongst the subject tribes. They occupied Cusco without a fight and installed **Manco Inca** as a puppet emperor.

Following this military success, **Diego de Almagro** led the first Spanish expedition south into the Altiplano, accompanied by Inca allies and reaching as far as present-day Chile. However, in 1537, Spanish abuses in Cusco and the realization that they were bent on permanent conquest prompted a massive Inca rebellion led by Manco Inca himself, forcing the various Aymara groups of the Altiplano to choose sides. The Colla backed the Spanish, causing them to be attacked by Inca armies and the neighbouring Lupaca. A year later, with the Inca siege of Cusco broken and Manco all but defeated, Pizarro sent a force led by his brothers south to aid the Colla. After a series of bloody battles, the military conquest of the *Collasuyo* – which the Spanish referred to variously as Charcas, the Collao or, most commonly, **Alto Peru** – was swiftly completed.

The first Spanish city founded in Alto Peru was **La Plata** (or Chuquisaca, now Sucre), strategically located in a temperate valley southeast of the Altiplano. With its dense indigenous population and rich mineral wealth – the two resources that the conquistadors were keenest to exploit – Alto Peru offered a rich prize, though initial efforts to consolidate control of the region were delayed by an outbreak of fighting between rival Spanish factions, an episode in which more Spaniards were killed than in all the fighting with the Incas. The full extent of the region's potential became apparent in 1545, when South America's richest deposit of silver was discovered southwest of La Plata at what became known as **Cerro Rico** (Rich Mountain). The mining city of **Potosí** that sprung up at the foot of this mountain of silver quickly became the centre of the colonial economy and the source from which vast wealth flowed out of South America to the Spanish crown. A second city, **La Paz**, was founded in 1548 just east of Lago Titicaca to reinforce control of the densely populated northern Altiplano and to secure the route between Potosí and Lima, the centre of Spanish power on the Pacific coast of Peru. Further cities at **Cochabamba** and **Tarija** (both 1574) followed, strategically located in the well-populated, fertile and temperate inter-Andean valleys, where maize and crops introduced from Europe, like wheat, could be grown to supply food to the mines of Potosí. La Plata was confirmed as the **capital of Alto Peru** in 1558, when it was made the seat of an independent royal court and administration – the Audiencia de Charcas – with judicial and executive power over the entire region. This status was enhanced by the creation of an archbishopric in 1609, while in 1624 a Jesuit university was established in order to train the religious and administrative specialists needed to govern the conquered territories.

Like the Incas before them, the Spanish were initially only able to establish control over the settled peasant populations of the highlands; the semi-nomadic peoples of the Amazon lowlands and eastern plains remained unconquered despite numerous military expeditions. In 1561 the city of **Santa Cruz de la Sierra** was founded in the midst of the Eastern Lowlands by a group of conquistadors who had marched across from Paraguay, the centre of Spanish power on the Atlantic side of South America, with the aim of reaching the silver of the Andes and establishing a strategic link across the continent, but the new settlement remained an isolated and precarious outpost surrounded by hostile indigenous groups. The most resilient of these were the Guaraní-speaking **Chiriguano** tribes of the Chaco, who posed a constant menace to the Spanish, and were only finally conquered in the late nineteenth century.

Colonial society

Initially, the Spanish sought to continue the Inca pattern of control through indirect rule. Colonial society was conceived of as consisting of two separate communities, the Spanish and the *Republica de Indios*, with the latter clearly subject to the former. A class of indigenous nobles – known as *kurakas* or *caciques* – was left in place to act as intermediaries between the Spanish and the mass of Aymara and Quechua-speaking peasants, who were permitted to remain in control of their land in return for tribute in the form of crops, animals, textiles and labour service. These peasants were administered through the exploitative **encomienda** system, whereby individual conquistadors were granted control of the tribute paid by large indigenous groups in return for taking charge of converting them to Catholicism and generally "civilizing" them – the standard moral justification for the Spanish conquest.

Though most Spanish *encomenderos* were more concerned with extracting as much wealth as they could from their indigenous subjects than with saving their souls, the need for a spiritual conquest to reinforce the already achieved military conquest was taken seriously by the Spanish crown, which sponsored all the major religious orders – above all, the Franciscans, Dominicans and Jesuits – to undertake the conversion of the Aymara and Quechua masses. Inca religious ceremonies, pilgrimages and public rituals were banned, and a great number of idols and ceremonial sites destroyed in a campaign known as the **extirpation of idolatory**. Beneath the surface, however, their mystical and magical appeal endured and, while publicly accepting Christianity, the indigenous population preserved its own deep-rooted pre-Inca cults. With time, elements of Catholicism and traditional indigenous beliefs intermingled, as the Aymara and Quechua appropriated the symbolism of the Christian faith, turning it into a vehicle for their own religious expression.

The religious orders were also employed as a cheap means of pacifying the tribes of the **northern and eastern lowlands**, who had resisted conquest despite repeated military incursions. Small groups of dedicated missionaries had considerable success in drawing semi-nomadic groups into settled agricultural communities, where they were converted to Catholicism and enjoyed the mixed benefits of Spanish civilization – as well as, most importantly, being protected from the ravages of the conquistadors. However, the regime of forced labour and the constant epidemics that swept the settlements meant that many groups later abandoned or rebelled against the mission regimes, and many missionary priests met violent deaths. Missionary efforts reached their apogee in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the **Jesuit missions** of Moxos and Chiquitos, where a handful of priests established a utopian and semi-autonomous society – a kind of theocratic socialism where thousands of indigenous people successfully adopted European agricultural techniques and built flourishing mission communities graced by some of the finest churches in all the Americas.

In the highlands, it didn't take long for the strict boundaries the Spaniards erected between themselves and the indigenous majority to break down. The conquistadors were overwhelmingly men, and most quickly took indigenous wives and concubines, so that within a few decades they were surrounded by an ever-increasing number of mixed-race children – known as **mestizos** or **cholos**. A complex system of class and caste developed, with Spanish-born **peninsulares** at the top, followed by Spaniards born in the Americas, the so-called **criollos**. The middle orders comprised a range of different mestizo classes, while at the bottom were to be found the oppressed indigenous majority.

The initial colonial settlement was undermined by the catastrophic decline in the indigenous population caused by European epidemics and diseases, as well as by the harsh burden of the *encomienda* system. With the indigenous tribute base falling each year and the supply of labour for the mines in decline, and fearing that the *encomenderos* were becoming over-powerful, in the 1570s the representative of the Spanish king in Peru, the Viceroy **Francisco Toledo**, launched a major reform of the empire's social and economic structures. The *encomiendas* were gradually phased out, and the indigenous peasant population was moved into large communities and towns known as *reducciones*, where tribute payments direct to the crown could be more easily assessed and collected. To solve the problem of labour shortage in the mines of Potosí, Toledo revived and adapted the Inca system of labour service, the **mita**. Under this regime, an area stretching from Cusco to northern Argentina was divided into sixteen districts, each of which was obliged to send one-seventh of its male population to the mines each year, providing an annual workforce of about 13,500 men – known as *mitayos* – at almost no cost to the mine owners. A series of other reforms introduced by Toledo further boosted silver output, while he also established a royal mint in which all silver mined in Potosí was turned into coins or ingots, thereby ensuring the Crown received its share of mining revenues. These reforms launched a century-long boom that turned Potosí into one of the biggest cities in the world and the single most important source of wealth in the Spanish empire. The regional economy revolved around supplying the needs of Potosí, while the city's silver also had a global impact, funding Spanish wars, fuelling long-term inflation and economic growth in Europe, and even financing emerging trade relations between Europe and Asia.

For the indigenous population, however, the *mita* labour system was a catastrophe. Of the thousands of *mitayos* who went to the mines each year only a few ever returned to their home communities: during three centuries of colonial rule, up to nine million indigenous workers and African slaves are thought to have died working in the mines – a major factor in the demographic collapse of the Andean indigenous populations. As only original members of landowning indigenous communities were subject to *mita* service and tribute payment, many left the communities to become landless wage labourers in other mining areas or on **haciendas**, the large, Spanish-owned farms that gradually took over much of the declining indigenous communities' agricultural lands.

The Great Rebellion

Indigenous resistance to Spanish rule continued throughout the colonial period, manifesting itself in frequent uprisings. Generally, these revolts tended to be local in nature and in response to specific abuses by particular officials, rather than wide-scale rebellions against colonial rule, and were usually crushed by the authorities with ease. In 1780–82, however, the Andes were swept by a massive indigenous rebellion that shook the Spanish colonial regime to its foundations. Encompassing the southern Peruvian highlands and all of Alto Peru, this so-called **Great Rebellion** was in part provoked by the **Bourbon reforms**, a tightening of the tribute system aimed at centralizing administration and boosting royal revenues, which had declined substantially during a long period of economic depression (caused by a decline in silver production) in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. A particular grievance was the hated *reparto de mercancías*, implemented in 1754, whereby the *corregidores* (royal officials responsible for tax collection) were able to force indigenous subjects to buy shoddy manufactured goods at inflated prices.

Above all, though, the rebellion was inspired by the messianic Andean belief that a reincarnated **Inca king** would return to drive the Spanish from the Andes and re-establish a just and equitable society. The leading figure in the uprising was José Gabriel Condorcanqui, an indigenous *kuraka* from the mountains south of Cusco who in November 1780 declared himself the direct descendant of the last ruling Inca (Túpac Amaru, who had been executed by Viceroy Toledo in 1572) and rightful Inca king of Peru, adopting the name **Túpac Amaru II**. Raising a large indigenous army and slaughtering a Spanish force sent to arrest them, Túpac Amaru and his supporters seized control of most of the southern Peruvian highlands and laid siege to the city of Cusco for several months. Though Túpac Amaru himself was captured and killed by royal forces after the siege was broken, his nephews – all of whom also took the name Túpac Amaru – continued the rebellion in the south around Lago Titicaca. Here, they formed an uneasy alliance with Aymara forces led by the radical Julian Apaza, a commoner rather than a *kuraka*, who adopted the name **Túpac Katari** (*amaru* and *katari* are the Quechua and Aymara words meaning serpent – a symbolic reference to the mythic underworld where the Inca king was believed to be waiting to return).

Though they joined forces to lay siege to La Paz, however, the two movements were deeply suspicious of each other, and fatally divided by ideology and factionalism. While the moderate Túpac Amarus sought to form a broad-based, multiethnic rebel coalition – including mestizos and even white *criollos* – Túpac Katari and the *Katarista* leaders were extreme Aymara nationalists intent on killing all whites and erasing all aspects of Spanish rule. So confused was the mix of messianic ideologies behind the rebellion that some leaders claimed the Catholic Church and the king of Spain himself had ordered them to kill all the Spaniards in Peru. Several powerful indigenous *kurakas* rejected the revolutionary message altogether and sided against the rebels, leading large indigenous forces to fight on the Spanish side. The war was characterized throughout by great brutality on both sides, with massive destruction of property and loss of life: in two years of fighting about 100,000 people were killed – perhaps a twelfth of the total population.

In October 1781, La Paz was relieved by a royalist army which had marched up from Argentina. The Túpac Amaru leaders surrendered to the Spanish in return for pardons or exile, while Túpac Katari – perhaps betrayed by his erstwhile allies – was captured and executed, his body torn to pieces by horses. By early 1782, the rebellion had been comprehensively crushed, while the remaining *kurakas* were removed from office and their property confiscated, completing the destruction of the indigenous nobility. Thus ended the last major indigenous uprising against Spanish rule in the Andes. The next great rebellion, when it came, was motivated by very different ideas and led by white *criollos* rather than would-be Inca kings.

The Independence War

By the early nineteenth century, growing discontent with Spanish rule had spread amongst the white *criollo* and mestizo population of Alto Peru, the result of severe economic depression, their exclusion from high-level administrative jobs (which were reserved for Spanish-born immigrants), and regulations preventing trade with any country other than Spain. At the same time the powerful ideas of the French Revolution and the Enlightenment, as well as the example of the successful revolt in North America, made independence from Spain seem a much more realistic prospect. However, the traumatic experience of the Great Rebellion had left whites and mestizos alike with an abiding fear of disorder and indigenous revolt, and the Spanish imperial bureaucracy was more than capable of putting down any local pro-independence revolts, so it wasn't until the sudden collapse of the government in Spain following Napoleon's invasion in 1808 that the impetus for revolutionary change arrived.

With Napoleon's brother Joseph crowned king of Spain, a radical "Junta Central" claiming to rule on in the name of the abdicated Fernando VII, and others supporting the claim to the throne of Fernando's sister Carlota, the elite classes throughout the Spanish empire were confronted with conflicting loyalties. Surprisingly, it was in Alto Peru that the first moves towards open revolt against Spanish rule took place. On May 25, 1809, the judges of the Audiencia de Charcas in La Plata rejected the demands of the president of Audiencia that they recognize the authority of the Junta Central, arguing that the colonies owed loyalty to the person of the king (now abdicated) rather than to Spain. In July, the citizens of La Paz went a step further, declaring an independent government – the first declaration of independence by a Spanish colony in America. These revolts were quickly crushed by armies sent by the viceroys in Lima and Buenos Aires, but this only fuelled the growing *criollo* enthusiasm for independence. Though Spain controlled the main cities, pro-independence guerrilla forces quickly established control of six rural areas that became known as **Republiquetas** – little republics.

In May 1810, the citizens of Buenos Aires successfully rebelled against Spain, and the same year sent an army to drive the Spanish from Alto Peru. Supported by the *Republiquetas* and revolts in several cities, the Argentine army liberated the whole region before being routed by a Spanish force sent from Cusco. Over the next seven years three further Argentine armies were sent to Alto Peru, but each failed to drive Spanish forces permanently from the region. Most major cities changed hands and were sacked several times, with the retreating Argentine armies showing the same contempt for local citizens as the Spanish. The forces unleashed by the independence struggle proved difficult to control, as both sides came to rely more and more on arming the indigenous population to provide troops, which led to growing violence and social conflict in rural areas.

Though it was the first region in South America to declare independence from Spain, Alto Peru was the last to achieve it. From 1817 until 1823 it remained relatively quiescent under Spanish control while the great events of the independence war took place elsewhere. In 1817 the Argentine General **José de San Martín** crossed the Andes to liberate Chile, and by 1821 the great Venezuelan independence leader **Simón Bolívar** – known as *El Libertador*, "The Liberator" – was advancing south through Ecuador having finally liberated Venezuela and Colombia. The two forces converged on Peru, the last major centre of Spanish power. Lima was occupied and, in 1824, Bolívar's most brilliant general, **Antonio José de Sucre**, destroyed the last Spanish army at the battle of Ayacucho in the southern Peruvian Andes, securing Alto Peru's freedom early the following year.

Despite its new freedom, the fate of Alto Peru remained uncertain. Bolívar himself initially opposed the creation of an independent state there, and handed control of the region over to Sucre. In 1825, Sucre called a constituent assembly in the city that would later be renamed in his honour. The delegates unanimously rejected union with either Peru or Argentina, and on August 6 adopted a **declaration of independence**. Five days later they resolved to name the new republic **Bolivia**, rightly guessing that Bolívar would be less likely to obstruct the independence of a country named in his own honour.

The early republic

The new **Republic of Bolivia** faced enormous problems from the outset. Sixteen years of war had devastated the country's infrastructure and severely disrupted the economy, while the mining industry in particular was in sharp decline, thanks to scarcity of labour and the destruction, flooding and abandonment of mines that had taken place during the Independence War. Nor did independence change much for the vast majority of the population – the indigenous Aymara and Quechua campesinos of the highlands – who remained excluded from power, which was exercised by a narrow ruling elite of mostly white *criollo* soldiers, merchants and landowners. Though the *mita* system had been abolished by Bolívar (and no subsequent government dared reintroduce it), the head tax levied on indigenous community members was maintained, generating over half of all government income.

The country's first president, General Sucre, sought to organize the Bolivian state along classic liberal lines, but his efforts to introduce a modern tax system were frustrated by the lack of a trained bureaucracy, while his attempts to attract foreign capital to revitalize the mining industry remained largely ineffective. His one major success was his radical attack on the Catholic Church, which had largely sided with the royalist cause during the Independence War. Sucre's response was to confiscate most of its wealth and property, a revolutionary act from which the Bolivian Church never really recovered. After surviving a coup and assassination attempt by former comrades in arms, he left office in 1829 and went into voluntary exile (only to be assassinated a year later in Ecuador).

Sucre's liberal and reformist policies were maintained by his successor, the La Paz-born **General Andrés de Santa Cruz**, who had also served with distinction under Bolívar in the Independence War. An able administrator, during his ten-year rule Santa Cruz created a relatively stable political and economic order, systemizing local administration and introducing modern law codes. Though he ruled as a dictator, he kept bloodshed to a minimum by contemporary standards, and remained widely popular amongst the *criollo* elites, despite being unable to revitalize the economy. His downfall followed his involvement in politics in neighbouring Peru, where he had served Bolívar briefly as president in 1826–27. In 1835 he intervened decisively in a civil war in Peru, defeating his arch rival, Peruvian General **Agustín Gamarra**, and naming himself protector. He then sought to join Bolivia and Peru together in a confederation, a move seen as a threat by Chile, which sent aid to rebels and then an entire army to Peru. In 1839, Santa Cruz was finally defeated at the battle of Yunguyo and went into exile, and the Peru–Bolivia confederation was dissolved.

The honour in which Santa Cruz is still held in Bolivia owes much to the nature of the presidents who followed him. For the next forty years the country was characterized by political chaos, presided over by a series of military strongmen, or *caudillos*, many of whom lasted less than a year before being ousted by an equally ruthless and ambitious colleague. General **José Ballivián** (1841–47) defeated General Gamarra at the battle of Ingavi, ending the entanglement of Peru and Bolivia's affairs. He also reduced the size of the army (though it still consumed over half the national budget) and established the department of the Beni, sending military colonies to the Amazon lowland region where *Cinchona* bark – from which the malaria medicine quinine is extracted – emerged as a major export. General **Manuel Isidoro Belzu** (1848–55), who took power a year after Ballivián was overthrown, was a populist demagogue who appealed to the indigenous masses with his fierce attacks on the land-owning elites and protectionist economic policies. After surviving over forty coup attempts in just seven years, he had the dignity to hand over power peacefully in 1855 in Bolivia's first legal elections (although only 13,000 people were allowed to vote in them) and went into exile, though he later conspired unsuccessfully to return to power.

Bolivia's first civilian president was **José María Linares** (1857–61), though even he assumed dictatorial powers. Linares changed the course of economic policy, reducing tariffs and opening the country to free trade and foreign investment, but was unable to control the military and was ousted within four years and replaced by **General José María Achá** (1861–64). In terms of its repression of opponents, Achá's regime was the most violent of all Bolivia's nineteenth-century governments: in one notorious incident in 1861, some seventy supporters of the exiled former president Belzu were massacred in La Paz. However, even Achá's notoriety was exceeded by that of his successor, **General Mariano Melgarejo** (1864–71), the archetypal Bolivian *caudillo*, famous for his violence, drunkenness, womanizing and corruption – as well as for signing away a vast area of the Amazon lowlands and Pacific coast to Brazil and Chile. Melgarejo also launched a sustained attack on the land holdings of free indigenous communities in the highlands, demanding that they purchase individual titles for land they already owned collectively or have it confiscated by the state. This scheme was largely blocked by massive and violent protests across the highlands – throughout this period indigenous political participation was largely limited to defending their lands and resisting new taxes – but the same approach was used later in the century to break the power of the indigenous communities. Though his hold on power proved resilient – in 1865 he defeated a coup attempt by Belzu by personally shooting the former president dead – he was overthrown in 1871 and died a year later in Lima, murdered by the brother of his mistress.

Surprisingly, the endless succession of military coups, plots and revolts that characterized the early decades of the republic caused little disruption to the social and economic life of Bolivia: politics was an elite pursuit, and the conflicts were usually limited to a few hundred men on either side. During the middle of the century, the nation's economy actually began to improve, thanks to a revival in the **silver-mining** industry, the result of the availability of cheaper mercury, more effective steam-powered machinery and fresh investment by a wealthy new class of merchants and *hacienda*-owners. From 1870 onwards the growth of Bolivian silver production was phenomenal, and an influential new class of mine owners emerged, though initially their power was not reflected on the political stage.

The War of the Pacific and the age of silver

As well as silver exports, economic growth in the second half of the nineteenth century was also spurred by the export of guano and nitrates (both used as fertilizer) found on Bolivia's desert coastal strip. This lucrative industry was controlled by British and Chilean companies – desperate for revenue, Bolivia had sold off the rights to the nitrates cheaply and guaranteed freedom from tax increases. In 1878, president Hilarión Daza, the latest military *caudillo*, increased export taxes, ignoring protests by Chilean and British companies and offering Chile the excuse it had been waiting for to pursue longstanding expansionist aims. Early the next year Chilean forces began the **War of the Pacific**, occupying the entire Bolivian coastline – where the population was in any case already two-thirds Chilean – and then invading Peru, which was allied to Bolivia. Bolivian forces sent to fight alongside the Peruvians were easily defeated, and Bolivia watched helplessly as its coastline was annexed and its ally Peru defeated and occupied. Though Bolivia officially ceded the territory to Chile in 1904, the loss of the coast – and with it direct access to the outside world – was seen as a national tragedy. Ever since, Bolivian politicians of all hues have invoked the loss of the sea as a means of cementing national identity, and regaining the coast remains Bolivia's foremost foreign policy objective.

The War of the Pacific proved a turning point in Bolivian history. Having witnessed an incompetent military regime stumble into a conflict that disrupted their exports and damaged relations with Chilean investors, the new silver-mining elite realized that a stable and financially sound government was vital to their long-term interests. The mining entrepreneurs formed a new party, the **Partido Conservador**, to pursue their aims of a civilian presidency and a powerful congress. For the next nineteen years the silver-mining conservative oligarchy ruled Bolivia through the Partido Conservador. They were opposed by the **Partido Liberal**, initially formed by those opposed to an early settlement with Chile, but otherwise differing little in ideology. Between 1880 and 1936, the parliamentary system worked fairly well, despite the limited nature of the electorate (a tiny handful of men of sufficient income and literacy) and the fact that neither party was ever prepared to relinquish the presidency when voted out of office, ensuring that limited violence remained a feature of Bolivian political life.

The high point of conservative rule came during the presidency of **Aniceto Arce** (1888–92), one of the country's biggest silver-mine owners, who carried out a massive road-construction programme and completed the railway from La Paz to the Chilean port of Antofagasta, Bolivia's first rail link to the sea and thus a vital route for mining exports. The expansion of the mining industry and transport infrastructure had a strong impact on rural Bolivia. The growing demand for food in the mining centres of Potosí and Oruro stimulated the expansion of the **hacienda system** at the expense of the free indigenous communities, with *hacienda*-owners acquiring indigenous land through purchase, fraud or outright force – often leading to local uprisings which had to be put down by the army. Though some communities maintained their traditional social and political structure as *hacienda ayllus*, working as serfs on the *haciendas* in return for small plots which they were allowed to cultivate independently, many others broke down, and migration to the cities and mining centres increased.

The late nineteenth century also saw the explosion of the **rubber boom** in the Amazon lowlands. The massive increase in the international demand for rubber – used to make car tyres, and in hundreds of other industrial applications – transformed the remote rainforests of northern Bolivia into some of the most valuable real estate in the world, and the region was quickly overrun by **rubber barons**, who gained control over huge areas of the rainforest, making immense fortunes and forcing the previously unconquered tribes of the region to work as virtual slaves collecting wild rubber. The indigenous population declined catastrophically and was saved from total destruction only by the end of the Bolivian rubber boom in the early twentieth century, after rubber plantations had been successfully established by the British and Dutch in their Asian colonies, where production costs were much lower. One consequence of the rubber boom was the occupation of the richest rubber-producing area along the Río Acre by Brazilian rubber-tappers. When the Bolivian government sought to tax their production they rebelled, declaring the Acre an independent state in 1900. After three years of sporadic fighting – the **Acre War** – the region was annexed by Brazil, an act later recognized by Bolivia in return for compensation.

The Federal Revolution and the rise of tin

The dependence on mining exports made Bolivia increasingly subject to international economic forces, and towards the end of the nineteenth century the international price of silver collapsed, breaking the power of the conservative silver-mining oligarchy. Fortunately for Bolivia, this collapse coincided with a growing global demand for **tin**, a formerly unimportant by-product of the country's silver mines. A tin boom ensued, centred on the mines around Oruro and led by a new class of Bolivian entrepreneurs who replaced the traditional silver-mining elite.

This change in the focus of economic power was soon reflected in Bolivian politics. The new tin-mining elite and the growing urban professional classes of La Paz (the main service centre for the tin mines) increasingly backed the Partido Liberal. Frustrated by the impossibility of taking power through peaceful means – election results were always rigged – they moved to overthrow the conservative regime. In 1898 a revolt broke out after the conservative government in Sucre rejected the demands of liberals in La Paz for local federalist rule, whilst a major Aymara uprising erupted simultaneously in the Altiplano against the continued despoliation of indigenous lands. Breaking the traditional rules of elite politics, the liberal leader **José Manuel Pando** sought an alliance with the Aymara rebel leader **Pablo Zárate Willka**, promising to protect indigenous lands in exchange for support against the conservatives. With the help of thousands of Aymara, Pando defeated the conservatives in bloody fighting in 1899 and took power in what became known as the **Federal Revolution**. No sooner was this achieved, however, than Pando reneged on his promises and turned against his Aymara allies, crushing the uprising and executing or imprisoning its leaders. Nor did Pando's federalism last: once in power, the Liberals simply made La Paz the seat of an equally centralized government (though Sucre remained the capital in name).

The Federal Revolution ensured the political supremacy of the new tin-mining elite, but rather than govern themselves they chose to rule indirectly through a class of professional politicians (most of them lawyers), a system that became known as **La Rosca** – The Screw. Their dominance was such that, between 1899 and 1920, there was not a single coup attempt. In other respects, however, politics remained much the same as under conservative rule: voting was restricted to a small elite of whites and wealthy mestizos, with the indigenous majority completely excluded; a liberal economic policy with low taxes was maintained for the benefit of the tin-mining entrepreneurs and major landowners; and the assault on indigenous landholdings continued.

Perhaps surprisingly, given that there were no restrictions on foreign investment in the mines, tin-mining came to be dominated by home-grown capitalists, above all by three **tin barons** – Simón I. Patiño, Mauricio Hochschild and Carlos Aramayo – who between them owned most of Bolivia's mines. But when world demand for tin slumped in 1913–14, opposition within the Partido Liberal grew, leading to the formation of a splinter **Partido Republicano**. In 1920 the Republicans, led by **Daniel Salamanca** and **Bautista Saavedra**, seized power. Their new government quickly found itself under pressure, however: a major Aymara uprising erupted on the Altiplano, while the mostly indigenous miners had begun to organize trade unions to push for better conditions. The first **general strike** was staged in 1922, and a year later the army carried out the first of many massacres of striking miners at the Uncía mine near Oruro.

As the 1920s progressed, the increasingly factional Republicans faced economic decline and growing social unrest in both the mines and the countryside. The international price of tin fell, and the government found it difficult to make payments on its huge foreign loans. Tin production peaked in 1929, and then plummeted as the **Great Depression** struck Bolivia's economy with a vengeance. Massive job losses further fuelled labour unrest, while strikes and military intervention in the mines became ever more frequent.

The Chaco War

By 1931 the government, led by Salamanca, was confronted by widespread opposition and deepening economic crisis, a situation to which it responded by stepping up its oppression of trade unions and the opposition and increasing its military spending. At the same time, the Bolivian army began aggressively probing the disputed frontier with Paraguay in the thorny wilderness of the Chaco. Border clashes escalated and, by July 1932, the **Chaco War** had broken out. Though many Bolivians afterwards came to believe the conflict had been provoked by foreign oil companies anxious to exploit deposits in the Chaco (they later turned out not to exist), in fact it's now clear that Salamanca himself deliberately started the war despite the opposition of his generals, perhaps thinking that a quick victory would improve his political standing.

It was a disastrous mistake. Over the next two years the Bolivian army was smashed and driven out of all the disputed territory with terrible loss of life. Late in 1934 the army arrested Salamanca and forced him to resign; early the next year Major **Germán Busch** successfully defended Villamontes, ending the Paraguayan advance, and both sides sued for peace. For Bolivia, the war was an unparalleled tragedy. Some 65,000 soldiers, mostly indigenous conscripts, had died out of a population of around two million – losses equivalent to those suffered by the European nations in World War I. Known as the "Chaco Generation", many Bolivians of all classes emerged from the war appalled by the corruption and incompetence of the high command and deeply critical of the traditional political system. The country became increasingly open to radical left-wing ideas, and the old political parties faded in importance.

These ideas also affected the army. In 1936 a group of young officers who had served in the Chaco, led by David Toro and Germán Busch, seized power, establishing a radical "military socialist" regime clearly influenced by European fascism. In an unprecedented step, the next year the government nationalized without compensation the holdings of the US Standard Oil company, which had illegally sold Bolivian oil to Paraguay via Argentina during the war while claiming it couldn't produce enough for Bolivia. In alliance with a range of left-wing parties, the military regime drew up a new constitution committing the state to much greater social and economic intervention, but these radical initiatives ended in 1939 when Busch committed suicide. A more conservative military regime close to the tin barons followed, but the growth of radical ideas in the postwar period meant that any return to the prewar consensus was increasingly impossible.

The road to revolution

The most important of the many new political parties that emerged in the period following the Chaco War was the **Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario** (MNR), which advocated nationalization of the mines, though its pro-Nazi stance led to some of its leaders being jailed on accusations of plotting a fascist coup. Together with a number of left-wing groups, it quickly came to dominate the national congress, as the middle-class electorate grew increasingly radicalized. Meanwhile, the trade union movement was also growing more extreme in its demands, and began to stage frequent strikes: one of these, at the massive Patiño-owned **Catavi** tin-mining complex, was brutally put down by the army in 1942, a notorious massacre that became a rallying cry for the left.

In 1943, in alliance with a small cabal of radical army officers, the MNR seized power. The new regime, with the previously unknown **Major Gualberto Villaroel** as president, supported the labour movement and sought to involve the indigenous masses more fully in national politics. In 1944 the mineworkers formed the **Federación Sindical de Trabajadores Mineros de Bolivia** (FSTMB; Federated Union of Mineworkers of Bolivia), which immediately took over leadership of the labour movement and gave important support to the MNR – over the following decades it proved one of the most powerful and revolutionary political forces in the country. In 1945 the government sponsored the first National Indigenous Congress and also banned the hated labour service obligation (known as *pongueaje*) required of indigenous communities on *hacienda* lands (though this decree was never enforced). These populist measures were accompanied by the vicious suppression of any opposition, however – when the Marxist Partido de la Izquierda Revolucionaria did well in elections in 1944, the government assassinated its leaders and jailed its members; the same happened to the traditional parties in 1945. The use of violence against middle-class politicians outraged public opinion, and in 1946 Villaroel was hanged by a civilian mob from a lamppost outside the presidential palace in La Paz, while the army stood by and watched.

For the next six years Bolivia was ruled by an alliance of the traditional parties known as the **Concordancia**, which struggled to cope with growing popular unrest and the economic downturn which followed World War II. During this period the MNR distanced itself from its fascist roots and re-created itself as a radical populist party closely allied to the labour movement. In 1949, it launched a major civilian revolt that saw fighting in all the major provincial cities; though crushed by the army, this revolt moved the MNR closer to the FSTMB, led by **Juan Lechín**, which had adopted a revolutionary communist agenda and turned the mining camps into bastions of radical activism. Though its leaders remained in exile, in 1951 the MNR contested general elections and won outright, only for the army to intervene, making the party believe that a popular armed uprising was the only way it would return to power.

The National Revolution

The uprising that the MNR had been hoping for – the **National Revolution** – began in La Paz on April 9, 1952. MNR activists distributed arms to civilians, while the miners marched on the city and stopped army reinforcements from reaching it. After three days of fighting in which over six hundred people died, the army surrendered, and the MNR's leader, **Víctor Paz Estenssoro**, took power. However, by arming the general population and involving the workers, the MNR effectively found itself committed to a massive social revolution far beyond its original programme. The first step was the introduction of **universal suffrage**, increasing the electorate at a stroke from 200,000 to almost a million, as the indigenous majority gained the right to vote for the first time. This was followed by a drastic reduction in the size of the army, with hundreds of officers cashiered and the military academy closed down. In addition, the government supported the organization of a powerful national workers' confederation, the **Central Obrera Boliviana** (COB), which was controlled by the powerful miners' union. The COB, which represented the MNR's most important support base, immediately pressed for further revolutionary measures. In October, the government nationalized the holdings of the three big mining companies of Patiño, Aramayo and Hochschild, bringing two-thirds of the tin-mining industry under state control. The mines were managed by a new state mining company, **COMIBOL**, which, like the mines, was to be partly administered by the workers themselves. Despite these radical measures, the MNR was wary of offending the US by appearing communist, and so promised compensation to the tin barons, as well as leaving medium-sized mines – including those owned by US companies – in private hands.

In the countryside, events quickly spiralled out of the new government's control. With no army or police to restrain them, the indigenous Aymara and Quechua campesinos began taking over *haciendas*, driving out or killing landowners and overseers, and organizing peasant syndicates and militias. Though it had never been part of their policy, the MNR was forced by events to issue a radical **Reforma Agraria** (agrarian reform) decree, under which *hacienda* lands in the highlands were given back to the indigenous peasants to be managed collectively through community organizations – the resulting indigenous federations emerged as a powerful force, and have played a major role in national politics ever since.

With the support of the newly enfranchised peasants and workers, the MNR easily won subsequent elections in 1956, with **Hernán Siles** taking over as president from Paz Estenssoro. But with the economy in crisis, the MNR leadership shied away from further revolutionary measures and turned to the US for financial aid. The US responded with loans and food aid, hoping that this support would stop Bolivia from turning towards communism. This help came with strings attached, including open access for US oil corporations, an end to workers' control of the mines, a wage freeze and many other limits to government expenditure and action.

These harsh measures stabilized the economy to a degree and helped attract foreign investment, while the US loans were used to build an extensive road system, invest in health and education and drive development in the Santa Cruz region – all key aims of moderates within the MNR. Despite this, a bitter factional rift opened within the party, so that Lechín, Siles and the trade unions were eventually driven into opposition. To counterbalance this, Paz Estenssoro began rebuilding and rearming the army in an attempt to shift the balance of military power away from the workers' militias. This move was quickly to prove a terrible mistake. In 1964, Paz Estenssoro was elected for a third term with an army officer, **General René Barrientos**, as his vice-president. Within months of the vote, a military junta led by Barrientos had turned on Paz Estenssoro and ousted him from power.

Military rule

At first it was thought that the coup would be only a temporary break from civilian rule, but in fact the army was to remain in government for the next eighteen years, inspired by a self-serving belief that military rule was the only way to ensure economic development and avoid communism. Barrientos immediately moved against the left: the leaders of workers' organizations were sent into exile, wages were slashed and thousands of miners sacked; the army also occupied the mining camps to crush strike action, resulting in a major massacre of miners and their families in the Siglo XX-Catavi mine in 1967. A charismatic orator and fluent Quechua-speaker, Barrientos simultaneously maintained the support of the peasant federations (who, having secured their rights to land, had become relatively conservative) by promising not to reverse the Agrarian Reform in return for their continuing loyalty – an agreement formalized in 1964 as the Pacto Militar-Campesino. This relationship underlay the failure of Argentine revolutionary **Ernesto "Che" Guevara**'s attempt to launch a continent-wide guerrilla war in Bolivia, which was crushed by Barrientos (with substantial US support) in 1967 without gaining a single peasant recruit.

Barrientos remained in control of the country until his death in a helicopter crash three years later. After a brief civilian interregnum he was replaced by General Alfredo Ovando, who was ousted just over a year later by **General Juan José Torres**. Torres sought to move military government to the left, even turning to the Soviet Union for financial aid, but was ousted within a year by right-wing army colleagues backed by the US. This latest coup brought to power **Colonel Hugo Banzer**, whose regime lasted for the next seven years – the longest presidency in more than a century. Initially, Banzer ruled in coalition with the conservative Falange Socialista Boliviana and the rump of the MNR led by Paz Estenssoro, before seizing absolute power, after which he banned all political parties and established an entirely military regime. In this he was clearly influenced by events in neighbouring Chile and Brazil, where similar military regimes had taken power (Argentina followed soon after). Like his regional counterparts – though not on the same scale – Banzer employed ruthless violence to enforce his rule, including torture, mass detention without trial and the murder of hundreds of political opponents. Even exile was no escape, as in the case of former president Juan José Torres, murdered by a death squad in Buenos Aires in 1976.

Banzer's regime coincided with unprecedented economic growth, fuelled by a long-term rise in mining production and mineral prices, and underwritten by the legacy of the MNR's investments in public education, roads and other infrastructure. Foreign investment poured into the privately owned mining sector and also into the **Santa Cruz region**, where vast areas of land remained concentrated in private hands. The region's subsequent agricultural boom, together with the exploitation of local oil and gas deposits, produced massive economic growth in the Eastern Lowlands, transforming the city of Santa Cruz into the second-biggest city in the country.

Despite the success of the economy and the brutality of his regime, Banzer was unable to prevent opposition to his rule. Although he maintained land grants under the Agrarian Reform and further encouraged the colonization of lowland areas by peasants from the highlands, Banzer alienated the peasant federations by ignoring their growing demands for price controls, credit and government assistance. The Pacto Militar–Campesino ended in 1974 with the **Massacre del Valle** in the Cochabamba Valley, when the army machine-gunned protesting peasants, while the labour movement regained its strength and launched a series of strikes despite the military presence at the mines. Even Banzer's traditional middle-class nationalist support was eroded by his failure to negotiate a Bolivian outlet to the sea with his Chilean counterpart General Pinochet. Under pressure from the new US president Jimmy Carter, Banzer promised to hold democratic elections, but popular discontent with his regime was by now boiling over, and in 1977, amid widening protests and strikes, Banzer prepared to step down.

The next four years saw dramatic political turmoil. In 1978 elections were held then annulled after massive fraud by Banzer's chosen successor, General Juan Pereda, who was set to lose to a left–centre alliance led by Hernán Siles. Pereda seized power, but was then overthrown by younger officers who, sensing the depth of popular opposition to military rule, promised fresh elections with no military candidate. Two elections, two brief presidencies (including that of Lidia Gueiler, the first woman president) and a further bloody coup followed, as new political groupings formed and attempted to gain electoral majorities. Finally, in elections in 1980, the centre-left coalition led by Hernán Siles emerged victorious.

Before Siles could take office, however, hardline officers launched yet another military coup, bringing to power General **Luis Garcia Meza**. Backed by a fearsome conspiracy involving the Argentine military, the Italian fascist lodge P-2, drug barons and wanted Nazi war criminals (including Klaus Barbie, the infamous "Butcher of Lyon", who conducted interrogations for the new regime), Garcia Meza presided over the most brutal and corrupt military regime in modern Bolivian history, enforced by paramilitary death squads who were used ruthlessly against opponents of the regime and funded by his government's direct involvement in the emerging international cocaine trade. But, despite its repressive measures, the extent of popular hatred against the military government, together with growing economic chaos and international disapproval, was such that it could not survive long.

The return to democracy

Garcia Meza was deposed in an army revolt in 1981 and two years later the last military junta was forced to resign following massive protests. The recalled congress elected Hernán Siles as president, marking a **return to democratic rule** that has lasted ever since, though few would have guessed it at the time. Siles quickly fell out with his coalition partners and was unable to control the economy, which had entered a sharp decline after years of military mismanagement. With hyperinflation rampant, Siles stepped down in 1985. The largest share of the vote in the subsequent election was won by none other than Hugo Banzer, standing as head of a new right-wing party, the ADN (Alianza Democratic Nacional). This wasn't enough to secure him the presidency, however: instead, the centre-left parties allied with the MNR and elected the 77-year-old Víctor Paz Estenssoro, the central figure of the National Revolution 33 years before, for his fourth presidential term.

To the surprise of all, Paz Estenssoro turned his back on the traditional MNR approach and adopted the **New Economic Plan** – a raft of orthodox liberal shock policies designed to rescue the economy and combat hyperinflation. The currency was devalued, price and wage controls scrapped and government expenditure slashed, while steps were taken to dismantle the state mining corporation COMIBOL, which had become a massive drain on government finances. The inevitable strikes and protests by the miners' union followed, until in 1985 the international price of tin crashed completely and the state-run industry effectively collapsed. The government was able to sack most of the miners and the power of their union on the national political stage was broken irrevocably.

The New Economic Policy was backed by the three main parties – the MNR, Banzer's ADN and the centre-left MIR led by Jaime Paz Zamora – and maintained by subsequent governments. Although it succeeded in ending hyperinflation, its immediate effect was to plunge Bolivia into a recession which was eased only by a growing trade in the production and export of **cocaine**. Starting in the 1970s in response to rising demand in the US, highland migrants in the Yungas and in the Chapare had begun growing coca, which was then processed in secret laboratories in the Beni and flown north to Colombia and on to the US. By the 1980s, coca had become a boom industry, generating good incomes for the peasant growers (whose numbers were swelled by thousands of laid-off miners after 1985) and huge fortunes for the traffickers. Much of the money made was reinvested in legitimate businesses in Santa Cruz, fuelling economic growth in the Eastern Lowlands – at the peak of the boom, cocaine exports were estimated to exceed all Bolivia's legal exports combined, and at one stage the leading Bolivian cocaine baron, Roberto Suárez, even offered to pay off the entire national debt in return for immunity from prosecution.

The enormous wealth generated by the cocaine industry created enormous corruption at every level of Bolivian society, with all the major political parties having links with drug traffickers. Elections in 1989 saw the MNR win a majority of votes, but horse trading in the congress led to the third-placed candidate, MIR leader **Jaime Paz Zamora**, becoming president with the backing of the ADN. Dubbed the Patriotic Accord, this cynical alliance between two former enemies shocked many Bolivians, although it also highlighted the growing consensus between the main parties and their common belief in the need to share power and rally behind the neo-liberal economic programme launched in 1985. In 1993 the MNR returned to power under president **Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada**, known to everyone as Goni, a millionaire mining entrepreneur who spoke Spanish with a strong gringo accent – the product of his upbringing in the US. As finance minister in the 1980s Goni launched Bolivia on the path of free market economics, and as president he continued this with a broad programme of privatization, which saw oil, gas, mining, railways and utilities sold to foreign companies – a direct reversal of the MNR's revolution in the 1950s. Goni was followed as president in 1997 by Hugo Banzer – the former military dictator returning to power through electoral means, albeit with a very small percentage of the vote – who pursued the same neo-liberal agenda. But while the former enemies who led Bolivia's main political parties were agreed on the direction of the country's future development, outside the party system new political forces were making themselves heard.

A New Revolution

Under pressure from the US, Banzer made the eradication of coca production a key policy of his government – a particular irony given the known links of most of his government to drug traffickers. But sending the army in to destroy coca crops in the Chapare region provoked massive resistance from the well-organized campesino syndicates, led by the radical indigenous activist **Evo Morales**. Meanwhile, on the Altiplano, a new generation of radical leaders inspired by an ideology of Aymara resurgence known as **Katarismo** was using the powerful national peasants union, the **CSUTCB**, to press for the complete transformation of Bolivian society to meet the needs of the indigenous majority, blocking roads and cutting La Paz off for weeks at a time in a conscious re-creation of the nineteenth-century rebellion led by Tupac Katari. And in Cochabamba in 2000 the sale of the city water company into foreign ownership provoked a spontaneous non-violent popular uprising that became known as the **Guerra del Agua** – the Water War.

Banzer responded to this rising tide of popular discontent in familiar style, sending in the troops to clear the roads and crush the protests. Unrest continued to escalate when Goni returned as president in 2002, after a narrow election victory over Evo Morales. Peasants, miners and civic groups united around the demand for the re-nationalization of Bolivia's massive **natural gas** reserves, by now the mainstay of the economy, controlled and exported by foreign oil companies. The widespread belief was that, as with silver and tin, Bolivia's richest natural resource was being exported unrefined with little benefit to the majority population. Tumultuous protests paralyzed the country, with the people of El Alto playing a key role in cutting off La Paz. After armed forces failed to quell the unrest, Goni fled into exile in 2003, leaving his vice-president, Carlos Mesa, to manage the crisis. Mesa held a referendum on the gas issue but refused to implement full nationalization and was himself forced to resign after mass demonstrations in 2005.

In elections later that year Bolivia's indigenous population finally asserted its political weight at the polls. Evo Morales – head of the coca growers' union and leader of the Movement towards Socialism (MAS) – was elected president with an absolute majority, becoming the first indigenous head of state since the Spanish conquest five centuries before. Brought up in a humble adobe house by Aymara parents in Oruro province, Morales had worked as a llama herder and migrant sugar-cane cutter before moving to farm coca in the Chapare, where his career as a peasant activist began. As president, he immediately pursued what he called a revolutionary agenda, inspired both by traditional socialist ideals and indigenous dreams of a return to a more egalitarian society that existed before the Spanish conquest. The gas industry was nationalized, with troops occupying the foreign-owned wells. A massive programme of agrarian reform was launched to redistribute land to Indian and peasant communities. Indigenous languages were taught at schools, and made obligatory for anyone working in the civil service. A new assembly was elected to rewrite Bolivia's constitution to reflect the needs and aspirations of the indigenous majority. Determined to end the influence of what he saw as US imperialism, Morales instead cultivated links with Fidel Castro in Cuba and the radical Venezuelan president, Hugo Chavez. But despite the excitement created by his election, Evo – as everyone calls him – still faced huge challenges in governing Bolivia. The powerful business elite in Santa Cruz bitterly opposed his nationalization programme, threatening to secede and using his own tactics of street protest and road blockades. The constitutional debate was paralyzed by disputes over regional autonomy, and new conflicts broke out between state and cooperative miners over his plans to re-nationalize major tin mines. Thus, although the election of the first indigenous president marked a new dawn for Bolivia, old problems of poverty, underdevelopment and ungovernability are still to be resolved.

Wildlife and ecology

From the high peaks of the Andes to the tropical rainforests of the Amazon, the Pantanal wetlands and the arid thorn scrub of the Gran Chaco, Bolivia's extraordinary range of geography and climate supports an astonishing array of plant and animal life. Quite simply, this is one of the most bio-diverse countries on earth, home to more than 17,000 known plant species, around 1400 different birds including many endemic species found nowhere else, and around 300 species of mammals. Poor infrastructure and low population density have helped ensure that large areas are relatively undisturbed by human activity, and around 20 percent of the total land area is now covered by national parks and other protected areas.

The Andes

The Bolivian Andes are home to a huge range of different ecological zones, from cactus-strewn semi-desert to swampy moorland and lush cloudforest, as climate can vary dramatically according to altitude, topography and other local factors. Much of the region has been settled for over two thousand years, and the original woodland has largely been replaced by eucalyptus imported from Australia. But patches of native Andean forest remain, including **Qeñua (polylepis)** woods that survive at over 5000m – the highest forests in the world. The most visible animals in the Andes are domesticated, in particular the herds of **llama** and **alpaca** which graze the arid grasslands of the Altiplano, but in more remote regions their wild relative, the diminutive **vicuña**, can also be seen in large numbers. Large predators are rare, but, though extremely difficult to spot, the **puma** is still present at most altitudes. Its preferred prey includes **Andean deer** and **viscacha**, a rabbit-like animal often seen on rocky outcrops. The more humid eastern slopes of the Andes are also home to the elusive spectacled bear, the only bear in South America. The birds of the Andes are much easier to find. Though difficult to view close up, the revered **Andean condor** – with a three-metre wingspan the largest bird that can fly – can often be seen soaring at high altitudes in search of carrion. At the opposite end of the scale is a range of different hummingbirds, tiny but highly active creatures whose wings can buzz at eighty beats per second as they hover to sip nectar from flowers through needle-like beaks. There are 83 different species of hummingbird in Bolivia, their iridescent beauty accurately evoked by magical names such as **sapphire-spangled emerald**, **amethyst-throated sunangel** and **fork-tailed woodnymph**. The margins of Lago Titicaca and other high-altitude lakes and marshes attract a great variety of swimming and wading birds, including ibis, grebes, geese, herons and – particularly in the far south of the Altiplano – three different species of **flamingo**, the Andean, the Chilean and the James's.

The Amazon

The greatest biodiversity in Bolivia – and indeed pretty much anywhere on earth – is found on the well-watered eastern slopes of the Andes, where the mountains plunge down into the Amazon basin through a succession of different ecological zones, from the high **cloudforest** or *ceja de selva* – whose gnarled trees are festooned with epiphytes and hundreds of different kinds of **orchid** – to the lowland tropical rainforest. With mighty trees soaring to create a canopy over 30m above the ground, the rich and luxuriant vegetation of the **Amazon rainforest** is in fact extremely fragile. The soils beneath forest are generally very poor, and the forest ecosystem flourishes only through a complex system of nutrient cycling involving plants, insects and fungi, so if the forest is cleared, the quality of the land disappears rapidly. The rainforest ecosystem supports an incredible variety of plant and animal life: over six thousand species of plant have been recorded in one small tract of forest, and the Amazon's unidentified species of insect alone are thought to outnumber all earth's known animal species. Trees aside, seeing wildlife in the Amazon is not easy: movement through the forest is limited to narrow trails and along the rivers by boat. Nevertheless, on any rainforest trip you're likely to see innumerable birds including brightly coloured **toucans**, **parrots**, **tanagers**, **kingfishers**, **trogons** and **macaws** of various kinds. Several of Bolivia's more than thirty **monkey** species are also easy to spot, including long-limbed **spider monkeys**, **howler monkeys** with their swollen throats whose eerie call echoes across the canopy at dawn, chattering **squirrel monkeys** and diminutive **tamarinds** and **titis** (a new species of which, unique to Bolivia, was only discovered in 1995). Larger mammals in the rainforest include the **capybara**, the world's largest rodent, the tapir, a lumbering beast the size of a cow with an elephant-like nose, herds of **peccary**, a kind of wild boar, as well as **giant armadillos** and **sloths**. All of these are potential prey for a range of wild cats, the largest of which is the mighty **jaguar**. The rivers of the Bolivian Amazon teem with fish, from giant catfish to the infamous carnivorous **piranha**. You'll also see **turtles** and **caiman crocodiles** of various kinds sunning themselves on sandbanks, as well as giant anaconda snakes and – in some rivers – pink freshwater dolphins. Many of the larger animals are easier to see as you head east through the Bolivian Amazon, where the dense rainforest gives way to the more open vegetation of the **Llanos de Mojos**, where seasonally flooded grasslands are interspersed with islands of forest and patches of swamp. Here. You're more likely to spot creatures such as **giant anteaters** and **rheas** – large flightless birds similar to ostriches, or even a **maned wolf** – a long-legged distinct canine species which roams the savannahs with a loping stride.

The eastern lowlands

To the south of the Bolivian Amazon the forest ecology gradually changes as it adapts to lower and more seasonally varied rainfall. The **Chiquitania** region east of Santa Cruz is home to some of the world's largest remaining tracts of **tropical dry forest**, a now extremely rare ecosystem which, while less bio-diverse than the tropical rainforest of the Amazon, is home to many of the same animal species, as well as a great variety of bird life. Heading further south, this forest gets drier still as it merges into the **Gran Chaco** – the great expanse of thorn scrub that stretches far across the border into Paraguay. This vast, arid wilderness also supports abundant wildlife, including jaguar, puma, deer, at least ten different kinds of armadillo, and even an endemic species of wild boar, the **Chacoan peccary**, which was identified by scientists in the 1970s. Large mammals in the driest parts of the Chaco have adapted to live without water for long periods, with herbivores surviving largely on cactus, and predators on fluids from their prey.

The contrast between the Chaco and the far east of Bolivia could not be greater. Here, the plains and rainforests of Amazonia gradually give way to the immense watery wilderness of the **Pantanal**, the world's largest wetland ecosystem, which stretches far across the border with Brazil. The endless swamps and waterways of the Pantanal are home to many of the same bird and animal species that you find in the Amazon. But though it does not match the overall biodiversity of the rainforest, the Pantanal is unique in terms of the sheer abundance of wildlife. Concentrations of fauna here are thought to be the highest in all the Americas, comparable to the densest wild animal populations in Africa – one estimate puts the number of caimans in the region at ten million, the highest concentration of crocodilians in the world. It's also one of the best places to see jaguars and the beautiful and highly endangered **giant river otter**. Bird life too is extraordinarily abundant, including innumerable water birds such as **roseate spoonbills**, **herons**, **egrets** and the massive **jaburu stork**, the symbol of the Pantanal, and at least fifteen species of parrot, including the highly endangered **hyacinth macaw**, the largest member of the parrot family.

Books

There are few books published exclusively about Bolivia, and even fewer Bolivian writers ever make it into English. That said, the works listed below offer a good range of background material on Bolivian history, culture, society and the natural world. If you read Spanish, Bolivian novelists to look out for include Alcides Arguedas, Oscar Cerruto, Renato Prada Oropeza and Juan Recacochea. A fairly good range of books in English – and many more in Spanish – is available from the excellent Los Amigos del Libro chain, which has bookshops in La Paz, Cochabamba and Santa Cruz. Titles marked 🏃 are especially recommended. In most of the following reviews, publishers in the UK and US are listed (where they differ) in the form "UK publisher/US publisher"; "o/p" signifies out of print.

History and society

🏃 **Jon Lee Anderson** *Che Guevara: a Revolutionary Life* (Bantam/Grove Press). Absorbing and exhaustively researched account of Latin America's most famous guerrilla, by the journalist whose investigations led to the discovery of Che's secret grave in Vallegrande.

Brian S. Bauer and Charles Stanish *Ritual and Pilgrimage in the Ancient Andes: The Islands of the Sun and the Moon* (University of Texas Press). Richly detailed description of the archeology of the two sacred islands in Lago Titicaca and their role as a major pilgrimage centre in the Inca and pre-Inca world.

Domitila Barrios de Chungara *Let Me Speak* (o/p). Harrowing autobiographical testimony of one of the miners' wives who took part in the hunger strikes that brought an end to the Banzer military regime.

John Crabtree *Patterns of Protest: Politics and Social Movements in Bolivia* (Latin America Bureau). Written before Evo Morales became president, this gives a concise description of the tumultuous political movements that help bring him to power.

James Dunkerley *Rebellion in the Veins: Political Struggle in Bolivia 1952–82* (Verso/Schocken Books). Dense but readable academic account of the National Revolution that transformed Bolivia in 1952, and of the bitter cycles of dictatorship, repression and popular resistance that followed. Particularly good on the labyrinthine politics of the labour movement and the left.

Claire Hargreaves *Snowfields: The War on Cocaine in the Andes* (Zed/Holmes & Meier). Detailed journalistic account from the frontline of the war on drugs during the coca boom of the 1980s, based on interviews with all the main protagonists, including coca-growers, traffickers, drug barons, politicians, police and DEA agents.

Olivia Harris *To Make the Earth Bear Fruit: Ethnographic Essays on Fertility, Work and Gender in Highland Bolivia* (ILAS). Collection of ethnographic essays exploring the culture and everyday lives of the deeply traditional *ayllus* of the northern Potosí department.

Kevin Healy *Llamas, Weavings and Organic Chocolate: Multicultural Grassroots Development in the Andes and Amazon of Bolivia* (Kellogg Institute). Intriguing portrait of nine different rural development projects – including the one which led to the renaissance of traditional weaving techniques in Sucre – which have used imaginative and culturally appropriate approaches to tackle poverty in Bolivia.

John Hemming *The Conquest of the Incas* (Papermac/Harvest Books). The authoritative account of the Spanish conquest, combining academic attention to detail and excellent use of contemporary sources with a compelling narrative style.

Herbert S. Klein *Bolivia, the Evolution of a Multi-Ethnic Society* (Oxford). The best standard English-language history of Bolivia from the arrival of early man to the present day: concise, detailed and clearly written, if a little dry.

Alan Kolata *Valley of the Spirits: a Journey into the Lost Realm of the Aymara* (Wiley). Lively account of the rise and fall of Tiwanaku by the archeologist who has done most to reveal its secrets, linking the ancient empire of the Altiplano with the culture and traditions of the contemporary Aymara.

Anne Meadows *Digging Up Butch and Sundance* (Nebraska). Lively account of an adventurous quest to solve the mystery of what really happened to the infamous North American outlaws – were they really killed by police in Bolivia and buried in the bleak mining camp of San Vicente?

June Nash *We Eat the Mines and the Mines Eat Us* (Columbia). Fascinating and sensitive anthropological study of the daily lives of the miners of Potosí and the deeply rooted customs and beliefs that help them survive the tremendous hardship of the mines.

Leo Spitzer *Hotel Bolivia: The Culture of Memory in a Refuge from Nazism* (Hill & Wang). Thoughtful account of the little-known history of the thousands of Jews who fled to Bolivia with the rise of the Nazis in Europe, forming a refugee community that never felt quite at home in Bolivia, and which has since largely migrated to Israel.

Steve J. Stern (ed) *Resistance, Rebellion, and Consciousness in the Andean Peasant World* (Wisconsin). Absorbing collection of richly detailed historical essays on Quechua and Aymara insurrections and uprisings, ranging from the Great Rebellion of the late eighteenth century to the radical peasant politics of today.

Chris Taylor *The Beautiful Game: A Journey through Latin American Football* (Victor Gollancz). Entertaining account of the history of the continent's sporting obsession. The chapter on Bolivia focuses on the country's struggle to defend its right to play international fixtures at high altitude, and on the Tahuichi youth football academy in Santa Cruz, which turns street kids into major stars.

Travel

Yossi Brain *Trekking in Bolivia: A Traveller's Guide* (Cordee). Specialist trekking guide covering a good range of routes throughout Bolivia, with clear descriptions, sketch maps and useful background information and advice for anyone planning independent treks.

Yossi Brain *Bolivia: A Climbing Guide* (Cordee). A must for all serious climbers, with expert route descriptions and excellent logistical advice and information by the man who was the leading climbing guide in Bolivia.

Mark Cramer *Culture Shock! Bolivia* (Kuperard). Light-hearted and sometimes witty introduction to Bolivian culture, customs and etiquette from a US expatriate living in La Paz.

Percy Harrison Fawcett *Exploration Fawcett* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson). Rip-roaring account of the adventures of the eccentric British explorer who surveyed the borders of Bolivia at the height of the rubber boom in the early twentieth century. The book was published posthumously after the author disappeared looking for the mysterious civilization which he believed lay hidden somewhere deep in the Amazon.

Yossi Ginsberg *Jungle: A Harrowing True Story of Survival* (Boomerang New Media). First-hand account by the only survivor of a disastrous expedition by three young travellers who tried to reach Rurrenabaque overland through the forests of the Alto Madidi – this is the book that launched Rurrenabaque as a backpacker destination.

Richard Gott *Land Without Evil: Utopian Journeys in the South American Watershed* (Verso). Wonderful account of a journey through the former Jesuit mission towns of Brazil and Eastern Bolivia, interspersed with finely researched histories of the many fruitless journeys and forgotten expeditions across the same region of swamp and trackless scrub made by travellers through the centuries.

Ernesto "Che" Guevara *Bolivian Diary* (Pimlico/Pathfinder Press). Published posthumously after being smuggled out of Bolivia to Cuba by a defecting general, the iconic Argentine revolutionary's description of his disastrous attempt to launch a continent-wide guerrilla war from the backwoods of Bolivia reads like the chronicle of a death foretold.

Ernesto "Che" Guevara *The Motorcycle Diaries* (Verso). Amusing account of Che's motorcycle trip through South America in the 1950s, providing an intimate portrait of a young beatnik traveller and romantic idealist undergoing some of the experiences – particularly in revolutionary Bolivia – that would later transform him into a ruthless guerrilla leader.

Michael Jacobs *Ghost Train through the Andes: On My Grandfather's trail in Chile and Bolivia* (John Murray). By far the best recent travel book on Bolivia, retracing the steps of the author's father as a British railway engineer in Bolivia in the nineteenth century and uncovering an extraordinary love story.

Rusty Young *Marching Powder* (Pan). Hilarious and terrifying account of a small-time English cocaine smuggler's experiences locked up in La Paz's notorious San Pedro prison.

Wildlife and the environment

Michael Bright *Andes to Amazon: A Guide to Wild South America* (BBC). Good general introduction to the astonishing range of ecosystems and wildlife in South America, lavishly illustrated with colour photographs.

L. H. Emmons *Neotropical Rainforest Mammals: A Field Guide* (Chicago). Excellent paperback with authoritative descriptions and beautiful illustrations of over 200 species, ideal for identifying animals in the wild.

Susannah Hecht and Alexander Cockburn *The Fate of the Forest: Developers, Destroyers and Defenders of the Amazon* (Harper Collins). Comprehensive and highly readable account of the threat to the Amazon rainforest, with detailed description of the political and social conflicts that underlie the destruction of the rainforest and a heartfelt and well-argued plea for its survival.

John Kricher *A Neotropical Companion* (Princeton University Press). Enjoyable general introduction to the flora, fauna and ecology of the tropical lowlands of South and Central America, well written and packed with detail.

Norman Myers *The Primary Source: Tropical Forests and our Future* (Norton). Compelling account by a leading expert of the most diverse and complex ecosystem in the world, the manifold ways in which humans benefit from it, and the dangers arising from its destruction.

Martin de la Pena *Illustrated Checklist: Birds of Southern South America and Antarctica* (Collins/Princeton University Press). Comprehensive field guide with descriptions and illustrations of over a thousand bird species, many of which are found in Bolivia, the serious birdwatcher's best bet given the lack of a Bolivia-specific bird book.

Bolivian music

Bolivia's music is as vibrant and as various as the myriad colours of its weaving. Much of it has a similar flavour to that of neighbouring Andean countries, evidence of the continuity of musical traditions amongst the indigenous peoples of the Andes, and there's a wealth of popular music connected either with the various festivals that dot the year, or to key events in the agricultural calendar, from cleaning village irrigation channels to potato planting. Throughout the country, music is performed by groups ranging from exuberant bands of villagers playing panpipes of all shapes and sizes to the lively brass bands that march through the streets during the country's major festivals. And, inevitably, much of this music is inextricably involved with dance: if you're lucky you might see the unforgettable sight of a full squad of young women *comparsas* swirling their *pollera* skirts, with *manta* shawls tied around their shoulders and bowler hats on their heads.

Andean traditions

The persistence of Bolivia's agricultural traditions means that musical life in most rural areas has enjoyed enormous continuity, and traditional music, bearing a direct relationship to that played in pre-Inca times, still thrives today at every kind of celebration and ritual. Because all the country's musical traditions are oral and bound to local events, music varies from one village to another – all over the Andes, villages have different ways of making and tuning instruments and composing tunes, just as each has distinctive weaving designs, ways of dressing or wearing their hats.

Panpipes and quenas

Many of Bolivia's distinctive musical **instruments** date back to pre-Hispanic times and can still be found throughout the Andean region. Perhaps the most haunting and memorable are the breathy-sounding handmade sets of bamboo panpipes and *quena* flutes which are played by local musicians across the Altiplano. In addition, other pre-conquest Andean instruments – conch shell trumpets, shakers (using nuts for rattles), ocarinas, wind instruments and drums – are still used by groups all over the country.

Panpipes (*siku* in Aymara, *antara* in Quechua, and *zampoña* in Spanish) are ancient instruments, and archeologists have unearthed panpipes tuned to a variety of scales. While modern panpipes – played in the city or in groups with other instruments – may offer a complete scale, allowing solo performance, traditional models are played in pairs, as described by sixteenth-century Spanish chroniclers. The pipes share the melody, each playing alternate notes of the scale, so that two or more players are needed to pick out a single tune using a hocket technique. Usually one player leads and the other follows. Symbolically this demonstrates reciprocity and exchange within the community; in practice it enables players to play for a long time without getting too dizzy from over-breathing.

Played by blowing (or breathing out hard) across the top of a tube, panpipes come in various sizes. Several tubes made of bamboo reed of different lengths are bound together to produce a sound that can be jaunty, but also has a melancholic edge depending on tune and playing style. Many tunes have a minor, descending shape to them, and panpipe players traditionally favour dense overlapping textures and syncopated rhythms. Playing is often described as "breathy", as overblowing to produce harmonics is popular (interestingly, modern city-based groups often evoke this breathiness using special microphone techniques).

Simple **notched-end flutes**, or **quenas** (which do not have a proper mouthpiece to blow through, just a cut in the open bamboo end), are another characteristic Andean instrument found in both rural and urban areas. The most important pre-Hispanic instrument, *quenas* were traditionally made of fragile bamboo (though these days they're sometimes made from plumbers' PVC water pipes) and played in the dry season, with **tarkas** (stocky vertical flutes, like a shrill recorder made from the wood of a taco tree) taking over in the wet season – they're played solo or in groups and remain tremendously popular today. Another small Andean flute with a span of three octaves is called the **pinquillo**, also made of bamboo, and made for the main part in the Patacamaya area between Oruro and La Paz. The **moseño** is a long thin bamboo flute probably modelled on the European transverse flute and played from the side.

Charangos

The **charango** is another characteristic Andean instrument. This small, indigenous variant of the lute or mandolin was created in Bolivia in imitation of early string instruments brought by the Spanish colonizers, which indigenous musicians were taught to play in the churches. Its characteristically zingy sound was the result of the natural Andean preference for high pitches, and because its size was restricted by the fact that it was traditionally made from the shell of an armadillo (although modern charangos are now generally made of wood, as the armadillo has become increasingly rare). There are many varieties of charango: from flat-backed instruments with strident metal strings to larger instruments with round backs which are capable of deeper and richer sounds – though all are small enough to be easily carried from place to place. The charango usually

Charangos, courtship and mermaids

In rural areas, particularly around Lago Titicaca, the charango is used by young, single men to woo and court the female of their choice, often involving the figure of a mermaid (*la sirena*), who offers supernatural aid to young men embarking on a musical pursuit of their chosen one. The ethnomusicologist Tom Turino records that most towns and villages around Titicaca claim that a mermaid lives in a nearby spring, river, lake or waterfall, and notes that new charangos are often left overnight in such places – wrapped in a piece of woven cloth, along with gifts – to be tuned and played overnight by the mermaid. Some villagers even construct the sound box in the shape of a mermaid to invest their charango with supernatural power.

When young men go courting at the weekly markets in larger villages they not only dress in their finest clothes, but also decorate their charangos in elaborate coloured ribbons. These represent the number of women their charango has supposedly conquered, thus demonstrating their manliness and the power of their instrument. At times a group of young people will get together for the ancient **circle dance** called the *Punchay kashwa* where the men form a half circle playing their charangos, facing a half circle of young women. Both groups dance and sing in bantering fashion, participants using a set syllabic and rhyming pattern so that they can quickly improvise. "Let's go walking", one might call, to a riposte such as "A devil like you makes me suspicious", or an insult like "In the back of your house there are three rotten eggs".

has five pairs of strings, though tunings vary from place to place and from musician to musician (British ethnomusicologist Henry Stobart once identified up to twelve tunings in a single Bolivian village). Some players prefer metal strings, others nylon, to suit a variety of strumming and plucking techniques. The charango may have acquired its name from the Quechua word *ch'ajranku*, from the verb *ch'ajray*, meaning to scratch, since in early colonial times indigenous Bolivians used to refer to the way Spanish musicians played their plucked instruments as *sumaj ch'ajranku*, meaning "rich scratch".

The charango is used to play a host of different types of music and dances. In many rural areas different instruments are played in different seasons: the charango is usually played during the winter months of June and July, when its shrill sound is thought to attract the frosts essential for freezing potatoes to make *chuño* (according to Henry Stobart, in the village of Macha in northern Potosí the older farmers now complain that in places where traditions are disappearing and the young men play the charangos at the "wrong" time of the year, the weather has become mixed and the harvests poor). Elsewhere, it seems campesinos still observe the instrument's traditional seasonal use, though those in small towns and urban areas often play it all year round. In some areas, different tunings and melodies are used for different seasons.

Fiestas

Major fiestas and other significant social events call for musical performance on a more extended scale, including large **marching bands** of brass instruments, drums or panpipes, whose predecessors captivated the Spanish in the 1500s. The drums are deep-sounding, double-headed instruments known as *bombos* or *wankaras*, originally made out of the hollowed-out trunk of a tree with the skins of a llama or goat. These marching bands exist for parades at fiestas, weddings and dances in the Altiplano and around Lago Titicaca – there's nothing more memorable than being in a village and hearing the sound of a fifty-man panpipe band approaching, especially after they've been playing for a few hours and have had a few well-earned drinks. It is perfectly normal for a whole village to come together to play as an orchestra for important events and fiestas – music is an integral part of all communal celebrations and symbolically represents the sharing and interdependence of Andean rural life.

Andean fusions: Los Jairas and after

The political events of the 1950s and 1960s are crucial to an understanding of recent Bolivian folk music. The 1952 Revolution led to a period of social and economic reform which accorded more rights to Bolivia's indigenous inhabitants, introducing laws which favoured Aymara and Quechua peasants, initiating agricultural reform and giving everyone the right to vote. Such reforms conferred new respect on Andean traditions, and were enthusiastically supported by many Latin American intellectuals, some of whom began wearing woven ponchos (which had previously been shunned as peasant wear) and taking a keen interest in Amerindian artefacts and culture. At the same time, rural people migrated to urban areas, bringing their languages and traditions with them. The new Bolivian administration created a division of folklore in the Ministry of Education, one of whose functions was the organization and sponsorship of traditional music festivals. Radio stations started to broadcast in Aymara and Quechua and began playing the music of these communities, often with musicians performing live in the studio, with recordings following.

Around 1965, an influential new form of Andean music emerged with **Los Jairas**, founded by Edgar "Yayo" Jofré. Jofré established the group to play at the Peña Naira in La Paz – one of a string of new urban venues where people could hear what became known as *música folklorica*. The idea was to form a quartet of charango, guitar, *quena* and *bombo* (drum): instruments that had never been played together before, having had their own traditions and seasons in the mountain villages. The quartet arranged the music to show off each of the instruments both individually and together, adapting Aymara and Quechua tunes and restructuring Andean melodies to suit an urban and European aesthetic. In addition, the group's *quena* player, the Swiss–French flautist Gilbert Favre, brought to his playing approaches learnt for the European flute, including the use of vibrato, dynamics and swooping glissandi, all of which were completely novel to the traditional Amerindian aesthetics. It was this style which became standard for urban folk music groups.

Los K'jarkas

Innumerable groups have followed the Los Jairas model. While some continue to deliver inspired arrangements of traditional tunes, others play foreign music

Panpipes and ponchos in Europe and back home again

Wander round the centre of any European town from Dublin to Budapest in the summer months and you're likely to find a band of musicians clad in ponchos and busking on *quenas*, panpipes and charangos. Their music ranges from the mestizo traditions of the towns and the roots music of the villages to the more international Andean tunes. Andean music in this popular form found its way to Europe sometime in the 1950s and by the mid-1960s it had acquired a following amongst the intellectuals of Paris through the work of groups like Los Calchakis. In Paris in the 1970s Bolivia Manta, a co-operative community of Andean migrants, kept the flame alive. In the 1980s and 1990s the most familiar groups to bring this highly professional, well-arranged and extremely beautiful music to Europe were Rumillajta (City of Stone) and Awatiñas (Shepherds) – both groups continue to tour Europe, Japan and Australia. In the 1990s, a new band, Kallawaya, emerged in La Paz, its line-up including ex-members of Rumillajta.

Awatiñas were brought up as Aymara speakers and a good half of their performance consists of traditional Aymara music, including festive and circle dances that form part of the regular rituals associated with the land. Awatiñas often appear with a banner saying "awatkipasipxananakasataki" (let our integrity shine) and are keen ambassadors for their culture. They compose much of their other repertoire themselves in the style of urban mestizo music.

Rumillajta perform mainly mestizo songs in beautiful arrangements, often on instruments they make themselves, although more recently they have included songs from other countries in Latin America, including some *nueva canción*. Their album *Hoja de coca* (Coca Leaf) is a good example of their music's rich textures. This is typical of overseas Andean groups – a style of playing developed to evoke the wind, rain and animals of the Andes – which you won't find in the music played back home. Rumillajta's successor group **Kallawaya** offer a superb array of original compositions, covering a gamut of moods and calling on styles which, while rooted in Bolivian traditions, are also in tune with modern folk movements in the rest of the Americas and Spain.

on traditional instruments in an attempt to demonstrate these instruments' virtuosity. There are also those who use both instruments and music as the basis for new compositions. As a result, the same tune can appear in different guises under different titles in various styles. **Los K'jarkas**, from the city of Cochabamba, are one of the country's most influential and successful groups. Like many such bands, they formed around a family – the three Hermosa brothers, all bilingual in Quechua and Spanish, and all composers. In common with other Bolivian bands they retain a strong sense of national identity: the name "K'jarkas" refers to a pre-Spanish fortress, while the group's logo – a stylized anthropomorphic condor and carving from the archeological site of Tiwanaku – appeals to a pre-Columbian past and millenary culture at the heart of the Andes. Astute composition and arrangements, which take into account the multiple audiences within Bolivia itself, earned Los K'jarkas an enormous following. In 1992, when one of the brothers died, fifty thousand mourners followed his funeral procession.

K'jarkas songs are largely sentimental, conjuring up a bucolic, rural vision of beautiful maidens, alongside evocations of Pachamama (Mother Earth). Where they score at home is in large part due to their incorporation of traditional urban dance forms. They mainly use the **huayño** dance form, but also employ the hugely popular **sayas** – a dance that originated with African slaves brought to Bolivia during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. *Sayas* are especially popular during fiestas, when they're popularly played by the brass bands, as well as *música folklorica* groups – the K'jarkas song "Llorando se fué" is a classic example (indeed, it was this song, in the version by the Paris-based group Kaoma, that launched the global lambada craze of the 1980s).

Canto nuevo

The sound of Andean panpipes and *quenas* was also at the heart of early Chilean **nueva canción** through groups like Los Curacas, Inti Illimani and Quilapayún. Influenced by Los Jairas and the work of Chilean folklorist and composer Violeta Parra, they adopted Andean instruments and music in the 1960s and 1970s, adding extra Latin percussion, guitars and other instruments. The move neatly combined music and politics: the Andean roots asserting collective values and an unmistakable ancient indigenous identity. Their styles have fed back to Bolivia, where they have been adapted into an even richer blend of harmonized singing, with alternating solo and chorus patterns. In Bolivia, *nueva canción* was reinterpreted in the 1980s as **canto nuevo**, whose top exponent is the folk singer **Emma Junaro**, who has performed politically inspired music as well as the subtle and graceful songs of Bolivian poetess and singer, **Matilde Casazola**.

Other dances

Salsa, cumbia and **merengue** have come down from Central America and the Caribbean to enjoy great popularity among young Bolivians, who are now making tropical hybrids with their own dance genre. Likewise, samba has come from Brazil. Older dances which remain popular include the **huayño** which involves swirling partners and can be done processionally, like European country dances. Other dances include *taquiraris*, *tarqueada*, *sayas*, *chovena* and *machetero*, all of which come from ancient rituals influenced by Spanish tradition. The most popular couple dances which have persisted from those that emerged from Spanish and European folk and ballroom traditions are the waltz

Discography

Awatiñas *Kullakita* (Awatiñas Records, France). Most tracks are new compositions in traditional style, arranged with this band's characteristic taste and skill.

Emma Junaro *Canta a Matilde Casazola "Mi corazón en la ciudad"* (Riverboat, UK). Junaro's beautiful voice here brings to life the mestizo songs of the great poetess, singer, guitarist and painter Matilde Casazola – sultry and nostalgic, with subtle and evocative arrangements played by an ensemble which blends piano, violin and percussion with guitars and Andean instruments.

Emma Junaro *Si De Amor Se Trata* (Tumi, UK). A passionate set of Latin American songs from Cuban to Bolivian composers showing the full range of Junaro's political commitment.

Kallawaya *Shaman (Medicine Man)* (Tumi, UK). A magnificent disc by a relatively new group (four of whom were founder members of Rumillajta), with superb ensemble performances of the group's own compositions which draw on styles and traditions from the whole of the Americas.

K'jarkas *Canto a la mujer de mi pueblo* (Tumi, UK). While this tribute to Bolivian women in true male Latin fashion idealizes women and their lives, it contains superb examples of the genre with texts which blend the lives of women and nature. Also includes their own original song "Llorando se fue" which became the notorious Brazilian lambada.

K'jarkas *El Amor y La Libertad* (Tumi, UK). Another set of beautiful songs sung in the rich style of this group who epitomize modern folkloric styles. Vibrant harmony and vocal arrangements for passionate lyrics which tell of the experiences and dreams of today's rural Bolivians.

Mallku de los Andes *On the Wings of the Condor* (Tumi, UK). One of the most popular Andean albums ever, but none the worse for that, with the engaging sound of its panpipes and charangos smoothly and beautifully arranged.

Rumillajta *Hoja de coca* (Tumi, UK). Beautifully produced and arranged album of Bolivian music displaying a full range of styles and delivered by a fine group of musicians, many of them playing instruments they've made themselves.

Various *Bolivia Calendar Music of the Central Valley* (Chant du Monde, France). Contemporary recordings of music dating back to pre-Columbian times, including music for panpipes, flutes and drums used for Quechua rituals and ceremonies. Excellent notes, with explanations of how different instruments are used with the seasons.

Various *Charangos et guitarillas du Norte Portosí* (VDE-Gallo/AIMP, Switzerland). Spirited local recordings from north Potosí department of songs in Quechua, often sung by a woman in high tones with a man contributing a lower second part, accompanied by charango, *vihuela*, guitar or *guitarilla*. The intriguing notes explain the use of special tunings for different times of the year and explain each piece, from potato-planting songs to those used in fiestas.

Various *Peru and Bolivia, The Sounds of Evolving Traditions: Central Andean Music and Festivals* (Multicultural Media, US). Lively and accessible introduction to today's sounds from both Peru and Bolivia, ranging from music performed in settings as various as private homes, clubs, fiestas and on the street, with harps, violins, drums, panpipes and much more. Moving from Cuzco to Ayacucho, La Paz to Lima, Lago Titicaca and back to Marcapata village near Cuzco. Good notes as well.

Various *The Rough Guide to the Music of the Andes* (World Music Network, UK). A vigorous and broad range of Andean music from contemporary urban-based groups – including key 1960s musicians Los K'jarkas and Ernesto Cavou, and their 1980s European travelling brethren Awatiñas and Rumillajta; soloists Emma Junaro, Jenny Cardenas and Susana Baca; seminal Chilean group Inti Illimani and new singer Victor Jara. Plus saxes and clarinets from Picaflor de los Andes.

and notably the **cueca** (which remains the national dance in Chile), which imitates the amorous adventures and conquest of a farmyard cock and hen, with complex choreographic figures and footwork.

Jan Fairley

With thanks to Gilka Wara Céspedes in Bolivia and Henry Stobart in the UK

Language

Language

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Spanish

Although **Spanish** is the main language of government and commerce, nearly sixty percent of Bolivians speak one or more of the country's thirty or so indigenous languages as their mother tongue, and over ten percent speak no Spanish at all. English and some other European languages are spoken in tourist centres and well-to-do hotels and agencies, but otherwise you'll need to know a bit of Spanish to get around the country and conduct day-to-day business. The most widely spoken indigenous language is **Quechua**, the language of the Inca Empire, spoken above all in the highlands of Cochabamba, Potosí and Chuquisaca, followed by **Aymara**, which is spoken mainly in the Altiplano. Most of the country's other thirty languages are spoken by minority groups in the Amazon and the Eastern Lowlands, ranging in size from tens of thousands to just a few hundred speakers. As well as Spanish, Quechua, Aymara and **Guaraní** (the most commonly spoken lowland language) are all official languages, and since Evo Morales became Bolivia's first indigenous president in 2006, they are used much more frequently in the corridors of power, with all civil servants required to speak at least one indigenous language. Unless you're trekking in particularly remote regions, you're unlikely to come across communities where you can't get by with Spanish, although learning just a few phrases of Quechua or Aymara is a good way of making a favourable impression.

If you already speak Spanish you'll have little trouble adjusting to the way the language is spoken in Bolivia, which pretty much conforms to standard textbook **Castellano**, spoken without the lisped "c" and "z". That said, it does, of course, have its own idiomatic peculiarities, one of which is the tendency to add the ending *-ito* or *-cito* to words. Technically this is a diminutive, but in fact asking for a *cervezita* won't get you a smaller beer; it's more often used to express familiarity and affection, and failing to add it onto the ends of words can seem abrupt or impolite amongst the indigenous peoples of the highlands. Bolivian Spanish is also peppered with indigenous expressions, particularly **Quechua** and **Aymara** words such as *wawa* (baby), *pampa* (plain) and *soroche* (altitude sickness); the indigenous languages also influence the somewhat unorthodox grammar and sentence structure used by many highland Bolivians when speaking Spanish. Bolivian Spanish also readily borrows from **English**, resulting in a slew of words which are regarded with horror by the Spanish themselves, such as *chequear* (to check), *parquear* (to park), *rentar* (to rent), *mitín* (meeting) and *líder* (leader); this tendency is particularly evident in mining regions where a host of nineteenth-century English technical terms is still in use.

The fact that Spanish is a second language for most Bolivians means that they're generally patient with foreigners' attempts to speak the language and not too precious about the finer points of grammar. The slow, clear pronunciation of Bolivian Spanish (in the highlands, at least) also makes it a good place to learn Spanish, and a number of Spanish (and, for that matter, Quechua and Aymara) language schools catering to foreign travellers have now opened in La Paz, Cochabamba and Sucre. In the Eastern Lowlands around Santa Cruz, Spanish is spoken with a much more relaxed, tropical drawl in which consonants often disappear at the end of words: thus "*arroz con pescado*", for example, becomes "*arro' con pe'ca'o*". Here, the diminutive *-ingo* is used instead of *-ito*.

Pronunciation

The rules of Spanish **pronunciation** are pretty straightforward and, once you get to know them, strictly observed. Unless there's an accent, words ending in d, l, r and z are **stressed** on the last syllable, all others on the second last. All **vowels** are pure and short.

a somewhere between the "a" sound of back and that of father

e as in get

i as in police

o as in hot

u as in rule

c is soft before E and I, hard otherwise: *cerca* is pronounced "serka".

g works the same way, a guttural "h" sound (like the ch in loch) before E or I, a hard G elsewhere: *gigante* becomes "higante".

h is always silent.

j is the same sound as a guttural G: *jamón* is pronounced "hamon".

ll sounds like an English Y: *llama* is pronounced *"yama".*

n is as in English unless it has a tilde over it, as with *mañana*, when it's pronounced like the "n" in onion or menu.

qu is pronounced like an English "K".

r is rolled, RR doubly so.

v sounds more like B, *vino* becoming "beano".

x is slightly softer than in English, sometimes almost SH except between vowels in place names where it has an "H" sound: for example México - (Meh-hee-ko).

z is the same as a soft "C", so *cerveza* becomes "servesa".

On the following pages we've listed a few essential words and phrases, though if you're travelling for any length of time a dictionary or phrase book is obviously a worthwhile investment. If you're using a **dictionary**, bear in mind that in Spanish CH, LL, and Ñ count as separate letters and are listed after the Cs, Ls, and Ns respectively.

Words and phrases

Basics

Sí, No	Yes, No
Por favor, Gracias	Please, Thank you
Dónde, Cuando	Where, When
Qué, Cuanto	What, How much
Aquí, Allí	Here, There
Este, Eso	This, That
Ahora, Más tarde	Now, Later
Abierto/a, Cerrado/a	Open, Closed
Con, Sin	With, Without
Buen(o)/a, Mal(o)/a	Good, Bad
Gran(de)	Big
Pequeño/a, Chico	Small
Más, Menos	More, Less
Hoy, Mañana	Today, Tomorrow
Ayer	Yesterday

Greetings and responses

Hola, Adiós	Hello, Goodbye
Buenos dias	Good morning
Buenas tardes/ noches	Good afternoon/night

Hasta luego	See you later
Lo siento/ discúlpeme	Sorry
Con permiso/ perdón	Excuse me
¿Como está (usted)?	How are you?
(No) Entiendo	I (don't) understand
De nada	Not at all/ You're welcome
¿Habla (usted) inglés?	Do you speak English?
(No) Hablo español	I don't speak Spanish

Me llamo …	My name is …
¿Como se llama usted?	What's your name?
Soy inglés(a)	I am English
americano(a)	…American
australiano(a)	…Australian
canadiense(a)	…Canadian
irlandés(a)	…Irish
escosés(a)	…Scottish
galés(a)	…Welsh
neozelandés(a)	…New Zealander

Hotels and restaurants

Una habitación doble	Twin room
Una habitación matrimonial	Room with double bed
Una habitación sencilla/simple	Single room
Baño privado	Private bathroom
Baño compartido	Shared bathroom
Agua caliente (todo el día)	Hot water (all day)
Agua fría	Cold water
Ventilador	Fan
Aire-acondicionado	Air-conditioned
Impuesto	Tax
mosquitero	Mosquito net
Llave	Key
Hora de salida	Check-out time
¿Sabe…?	Do you know…?
No sé	I don't know
(¿)Hay(?)	There is (is there)?
Deme…	Give me…
(uno así)	(one like that)
¿Tiene …?	Do you have…?
…una habitación	…a room

…con dos camas/ cama matrimonial	…with two beds/ double bed
es para una persona	It's for one person
(dos personas)	(two people)
…para una noche	…for one night
(una semana)	(one week)
¿Está bien, cuánto es?	It's fine, how much is it?
Es demasiado caro	It's too expensive
¿No tiene algo más barato?	Don't you have anything cheaper?
¿Se puede…?	Can one…?
¿…acampar aqui (cerca)?	…camp (near) here?
¿Hay un hotel aquí cerca?	Is there a hotel nearby?
Quiero	I want
Querría	I'd like
¿Qué hay para comer?	What is there to eat?
¿Qué es eso?	What's that?
¿Como se llama este en español?	What's this called in Spanish?

Directions and transport

Terminal terrestre, Terminal de buses	Bus terminal
Bus, flota, movilidad	Bus
Pasaje	Ticket

Asiento	Seat
Pasillo	Aisle
Ventana	Window
Equipaje	Luggage
Como se llega a…?	How do I get to…?

Izquierda, derecha, derecho	Left, right, straight on
¿Dondé está…?	Where is…?
…el terminal de buses	…the bus station
…la estación de ferrocarriles	…the train station
…el banco más -cercano	…the nearest bank
…el correo	…the post office
…el baño	…the toilet
¿De dónde sale el bus para…?	Where does the bus to…leave from?

¿A qué hora sale el bus?	What time does the bus leave?
¿A qué hora llega el bus?	What time does the bus arrive?
¿Cuánto tiempo demora el viaje?	How long does the journey take?
¿Es éste el tren para …?	Is this the train for …?
Quería pasaje (de ida y vuelta) para…	I'd like a (return) ticket to…
¿A qué hora sale (llega a…)?	What time does it leave (arrive at…)?

Numbers and days

un/uno/una	1
dos	2
tres	3
cuatro	4
cinco	5
seis	6
siete	7
ocho	8
nueve	9
diez	10
once	11
doce	12
trece	13
catorce	14
quince	15
dieciséis	16
veinte	20
veitiuno	21
treinta	30
cuarenta	40
cincuenta	50
sesenta	60
setenta	70
ochenta	80
noventa	90
cien(to)	100
ciento uno	101
doscientos	200
doscientos uno	201
quinientos	500
mil	1000
dos mil	2000

primero/a	first
segundo/a	second
tercero/a	third

lunes	Monday
martes	Tuesday
miércoles	Wednesday
jueves	Thursday
viernes	Friday
sábado	Saturday
domingo	Sunday

Food and drink

Basics

Aceite	Oil
Ají	Chilli
Ajo	Garlic
Almuerzo	(Set) lunch
Arroz	Rice
Azúcar	Sugar
La carta	Menu
Cena	(Set) dinner

Comida típica	Traditional food
Cuchara	Spoon
Cuchillo	Knife
La cuenta	The bill
Desayuno	Breakfast
Ensalada	Salad
Galletas	Biscuits
Harina	Flour
Hielo	Ice
Huevos	Eggs
Llajua	Chilli sauce
Mantequilla	Butter

Mermelada	Jam
Miel de Abeja	Honey
Mostaza	Mustard
Pan (integral)	(Wholemeal) bread
Pimienta negra	Black pepper
Plato	Dish
Queso	Cheese
Sal	Salt
Salsa	Sauce
Tenedeor	Fork
Vegetariano	Vegetarian

Cooking terms

A la parilla	Barbecued
A la plancha	Griddled
Ahumado	Smoked
Al ajillo	In garlic
Al horno	Oven baked
Asado	Roast
Crudo	Raw

Duro	Hard boiled
Frío	Cold
Frito	Fried
Picante	Spicy
Relleno	Stuffed
Revuelto	Scrambled
Sancochado	Boiled

Soup (*sopa*), meat (*carne*), poultry (*aves*) and fish (*pescado*)

Anticuchos	Skewered heart
Atún	Tuna (tinned)
Bistec	Beefsteak
Cangrejo	Crab
Carne de cerdo/ chanco	Pork
Carne de res	Beef
Charque	Dried meat (usually llama)
Chicharron	Deep-fried pork
Chicharron de Pollo	Deep-fried chicken
Chuleta	T-bone steak
Chuleta de Cerdo	Pork chop
Churrasco	Minute steak
Conejo	Rabbit

Cordero	Mutton
Hamburguesa	Hamburger
Higado	Liver
Jamón	Ham
Lechón	Roast pork
Lomo	Filet steak
Milanesa	Breaded escalope
Parillada	Barbecued meat
Pato	Duck
Pavo	Turkey
Pejerrey	Kingfish
Pollo (a la brasa)	(Spit-roasted) chicken
Riñon	Kidney
Surubí	Catfish
Tocino	Bacon
Trucha	Trout

Vegetables (*verduras*)

Arvejas	Peas
Camote	Sweet potato
Castaña	Brazil nut

Cebolla	Onion
Champiñon	Mushroom
Choclo	Corn on the cob

Espinaca	Spinach
Frijoles	Beans
Habas	Broad beans
Lechuga	Lettuce
Locoto	Chilli pepper
Maíz	Maize, corn
Maní	Peanut
Palmito	Palm heart
Palta	Avocado
Papa	Potato
Tomate	Tomato
Yuca	Manioc
Zanahoria	Carrot
Zapallo	Pumpkin

Fruit (*frutas*)

Banano/Guineo/Plátano	Banana (the latter is also plantain)
Carambola	Star fruit
Chirimoya	Custard apple
Durazno	Peach
Frutilla	Strawberry
Limón	Lemon
Mandarina	Mandarin
Mango	Mango
Manzana	Apple
Maracuyá	Passionfruit
Naranja	Orange
Papaya	Papaya
Piña	Pineapple
Toronja	Grapefruit
Uvas	Grapes

Snacks

Cuñapes	Yucca and cheese pastry
Empanada	Cheese or meat pasty
Humintas	Maize, cheese and raisin porridge wrapped in leaves
Papas fritas	Potato chips/French fries
Salteña	Juicy meat, chicken and vegetable pasty
Tostados	Toast
Tucumana	Fried meat and vegetable pasty

Desserts (*postres*)

Arroz con leche	Rice pudding
Ensalada de frutas	Fruit salad
Flan	Crème caramel
Gelatina	Jelly
Helado	Ice cream
Torta	Cake

Drinks (*bebidas*)

Agua	Water
Agua hervida	Boiled water
Agua mineral (con gas/sin gas)	Mineral water (fizzy/still)
Api	Hot, thick, sweet maize drink
Café	Coffee
Café con leche	White coffee
Cerveza	Beer
Chicha	Fermented maize beer
Chocolate	Hot chocolate
Chopp	Draft beer
Chufflay	Singani and Sprite
Jugo (de naranja)	Orange juice
Limonada	(Real) lemonade
Leche	Milk
Mate	Herbal tea
Mate de coca	Coca tea
Mate de manzanilla	Camomile tea
Refresco	Soft drink
Té	Tea

Glossary

Achachila/Apu Powerful mountain gods or spirits believed to inhabit high Andean peaks

Adobe Sun-dried mud brick

Aguas termales Thermal baths, hot springs

Apacheta Stone cairn marking mountain passes, created by travellers carrying stones on the climb up as penance and as an offering to the mountain gods

Artesanía Traditional handicraft

Ayllu Andean extended kinship group, roughly equivalent to a clan or tribe

Barrio Neighbourhood, quarter or suburb

Cabaña Cabin

Calle Street

Camba Old Inca term for lowland tribes, now used as slang term for people from the Eastern Lowlands

Camion Lorry

Camioneta Pick-up truck

Campesino Peasant: literally, from the countryside

Canoa Dugout canoe

Caudillo Chief, military strongman

Chaco Cultivated clearing in the forest, also the verb for creating such clearings through slash and burn

Challa Ritual offering of alcohol and sweets to the mountain spirits, often carried out as a blessing for a new house or car

Chicha Fermented maize beer

Cholo Mixed race or urbanized indigenous person

Colectivo Collective taxi

Colla Ancient Aymara nation, now a slang term for people from the Altiplano

Cordillera Mountain range

Criollo "Creole": used historically to refer to a person of Spanish blood born in the American colonies

Curandero Healer

Encomienda A grant of indigenous labourers to landowners during early colonial times

ENTEL Bolivia's national telephone company

Finca Small farm

Flota Bus (company)

Gringo Originally someone from the United States, now a non-derogatory term used for all white foreigners

Guardaparque Park guard

Hacienda Large private farm or estate

Huaca Sacred place or object

Indígena Used adjectivally to mean "indigenous", or as a noun to refer to an indigenous person

Junta A ruling council; usually used to describe small groups who've staged a coup d'état

Kuraka Indigenous nobleman in the colonial era

Lejía Alkaline reagent used when chewing coca

Mestizo Person of mixed Spanish and indigenous blood

Mirador Viewpoint

Nevado Snowcapped mountain

Pampa Plain

Peña Nightclub where live music is performed, often folk music

Plata Silver; slang for money

Puna High-altitude grassland, starting around 3000m

Quebrada Ravine, dried-out stream

Sala Room or hall

Salar Saltpan or lake

Selva Jungle or tropical rainforest

S/n Used in addresses to indicate "*sin número*", or without a number

Soroche Altitude sickness

Tinku Andean ritual combat

Tranca Police roadblock

Wiphala Rainbow-chequered flag used as a symbol of indigenous Andean identity

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store

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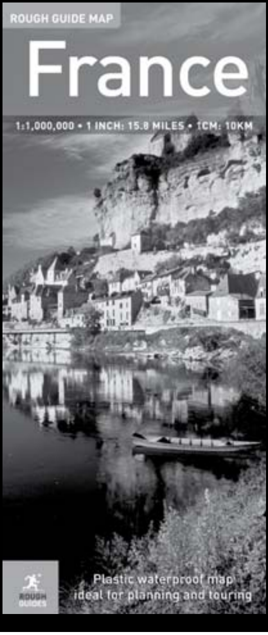
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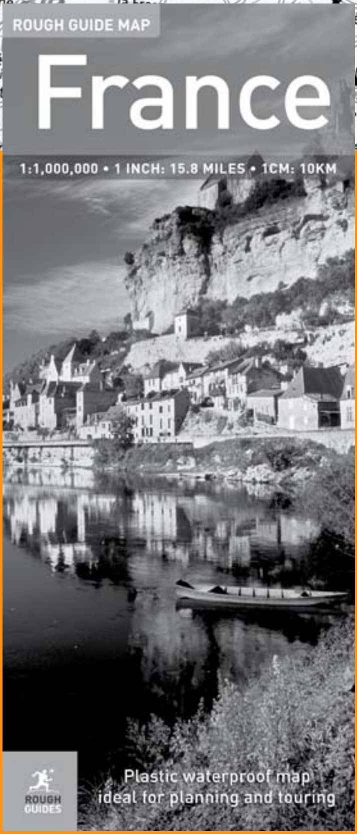
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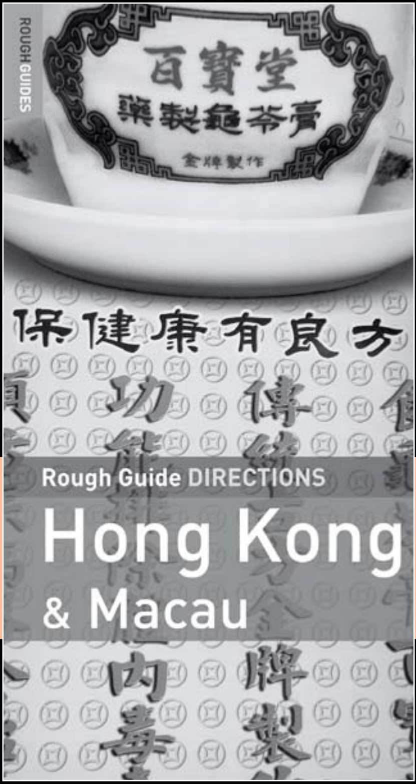
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1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2

Help us update

We've gone to a lot of effort to ensure that the second edition of **The Rough Guide to Bolivia** is accurate and up to date. However, things change – places get "discovered", opening hours are notoriously fickle, restaurants and rooms raise prices or lower standards. If you feel we've got it wrong or left something out, we'd like to know, and if you can remember the address, the price, the hours, the phone number, so much the better.

Please send your comments with the subject line "**Rough Guide Bolivia Update**" to mail @roughguides.com, or by post to the address above. We'll credit all contributions and send a copy of the next edition (or any other Rough Guide if you prefer) for the very best emails.

Have your questions answered and tell others about your trip at community.roughguides.com.

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Map symbols

maps are listed in the full index using colored text

‒ · ‒ · ‒	International border
– – – –	Chapter division boundary
═	Paved roads
—	Unpaved roads
········	4WD only roads
- - - - - - -	Footpath
|||||||||||	Steps
━ ━ ━	Railway
┼┼┼┼┼┼	Cable car
— — -	Ferry route
—	River
≍	Bridge
◆	Point of interest
⌃⌃	Mountain range
▲	Peak
⋀	Volcano
✺	Mirador
↟	Lighthouse
♨	Hot spring
∴	Ruins
⊙	Statue
∩	Arch
✈	Airport
★	Transport stop
⌂	Lodge
⛺	Campground
ⓘ	Information office
✆	Telephone
✉	Post office
@	Internet access
♣	Museum
⬭	Stadium
■	Building
⊞	Church
✝	Cemetery
▨	Park
▭	Marsh
☰	Salt pan

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❷ US$5–10
❸ US$10–15
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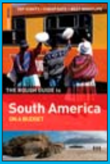

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